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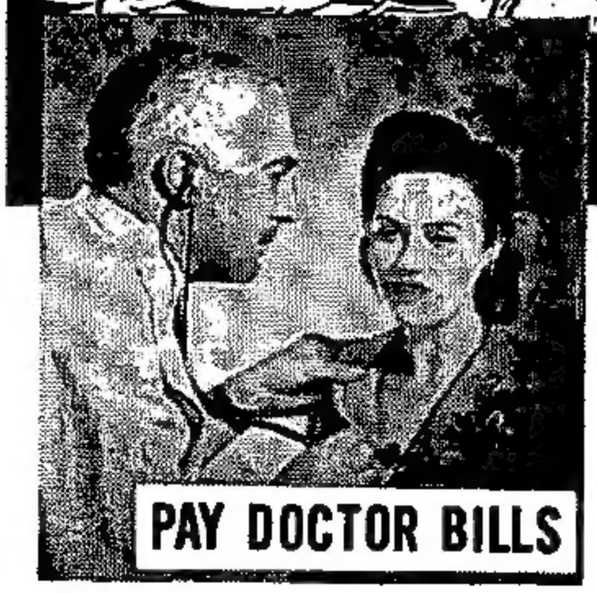

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FEBRUARY, 1953

MARY GNAEDINGER, *Editor*

VOL. 14 NO. 2

Full-Length Feature

FULL MOON — **Talbot Mundy** — **10**

Into the dark and brooding India that must remain forever secret, Blair Warrender knew that evil magic followed him. . . . Indeed, that his long sought friend might be still living in the mysterious world known only to the dead. . . .

Copyright by Talbot Mundy, 1934, 1935.

Short Story

THE EYES OF DROMU — **Cedric R. Mentiplay** — **96**

When Andrew hid the little wounded man from the crashed flying saucer, was he doing an act of kindness—or letting in a menace such as Earth had never faced before?

Features

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT — **6**

IN THE NEXT ISSUE — **93**

EKRERAR OF PALORAE — **Louis M. Hobbs** — **94**

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

THE NEXT ISSUE

WILL BE ON SALE JANUARY 21

Cover by Saunders. Inside Illustrations by Finlay and Lawrence.

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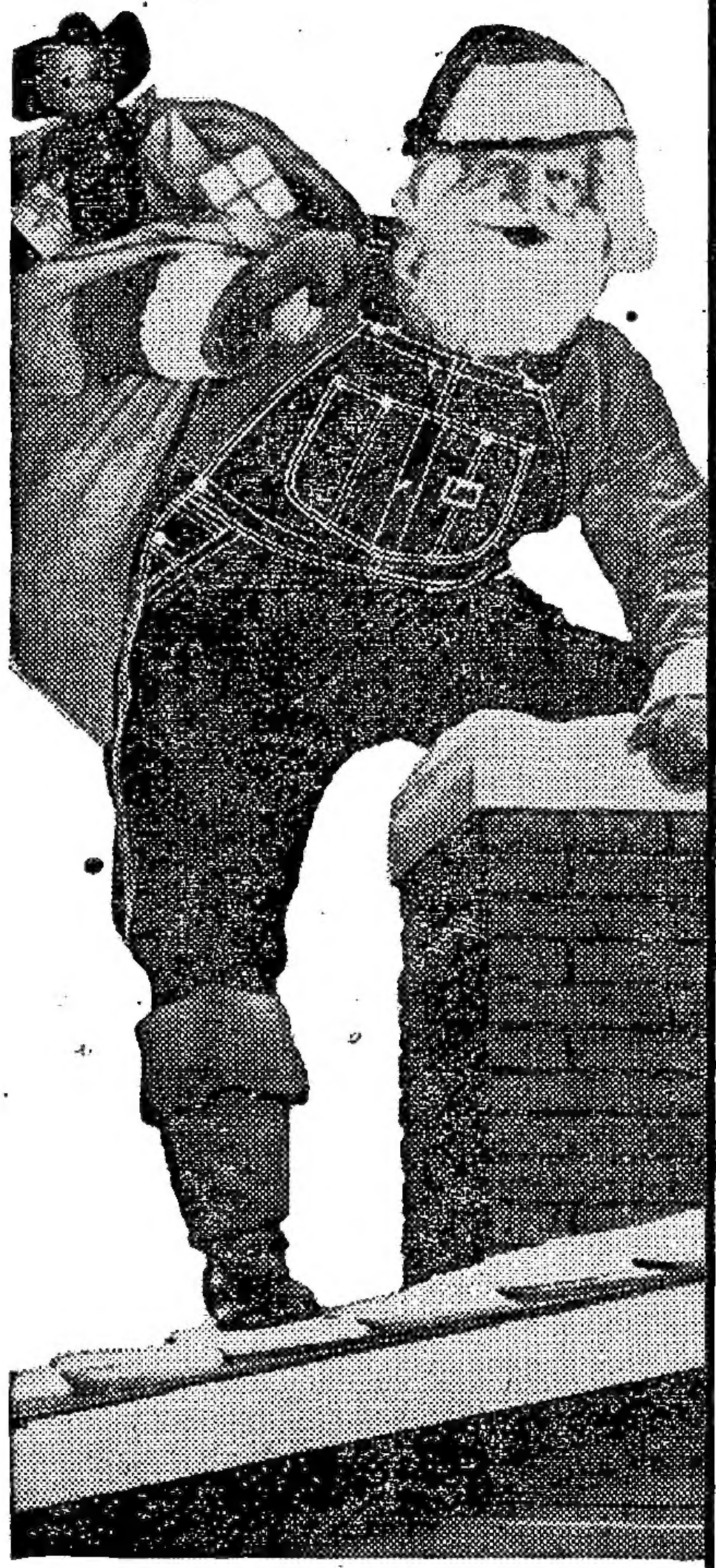

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THE READERS VIEWPOINT

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

THE EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Readers:

In bringing "Full Moon" by Talbot Mundy to you in this issue, we feel that we are restoring, as it were, a gem from the sparkling diadem of the famous past. Talbot Mundy was one of the great fantasy and adventure writers of a time when the art of writing a firmly built long magazine story was probably at its zenith, and he was one of those great and brilliant men, like A. Merritt, George Allan England and Austin Hall, who were proudly proclaimed to be "The Men Who Made the *Argosy*."

Talbot Mundy was born in London, and spent nearly ten years in the British Government service in India and East Africa. That experience provided an authentic background for many of his novels and short stories, some of the best known of which include "Tros of Samothrace," "Jimgrim," "C.I.D.," "The Gray Mahatma," "Jungle Jest" and "King of the Khyber Rifles."

Mr. Mundy was born in 1897. He came to America in 1911 and made his home here until his death in 1940. Most of his writing was done at his residence in New York City, and it is said that he usually began work at three o'clock in the morning and continued until he was so tired he was unfit for anything else.

The April issue will bring another great fantasy by one of F.F.M. readers' favorite authors, H. Rider Haggard. "The Wanderer's Necklace" is a rare story, the original volume of which is very difficult to obtain, and it is one of the master's best fantasies.

Yours in Fantasy,

Mary Gnaedinger

"AN EXCELLENT CHOICE"

Dear Mary Gnaedinger:

Realization has just come to me of the great debt of gratitude that I owe you and F.F.M., for having printed many letters of mine. Through them, I have met some wonderful people, and for that I can never thank you enough.

F.F.M.'s October issue came in today, and as I sit here listening to Brahms' 4th Symphony, I shall comment on it. The cover painting is thoroughly fabulous, and quite the most beautiful magazine cover I have seen in many months. It is a distinct change from Lawrence's previous covers this year. The colors are so mellowed and subdued; they seem to glow, almost. A remarkable work of art!

The novel was an excellent choice, one of Rohmer's most exciting and compelling fantasies. Now that this novel has been reprinted, it would seem that the best field for further Rohmer reprints is his short stories. Only one or two others of his novels, "Batwing" and perhaps "The Green Eyes of Bast" or "Quest of the Sacred Slipper," are suitable for F.F.M., inasmuch as you have said that his Fu-Manchu novels are too much mystery and not enough fantasy for F.F.M. But in the short stories, there are such gems as "Lord of the Jackals," "Light of Atlantis," "The Hand of the Mandarin Quong," "The Curse of a Thousand Kisses," and "The Mark of Maat."

John Collier's "Thus I Refute Beelzy" is just as chilly as always. And orchids to Finlay for a marvelously subtle and very fine illustration.

And now the selection for Dec. issue . . . Cometh long and loud cheers from the balcony! Robert E. Howard at last! "Skull-Face" is a fine novel, Howard's first and one of his most exciting. Although it is currently available in book form, I'll bet that a goodly number of readers will welcome the chance to obtain it for a quarter instead of paying $5.00 for the book. And with Finlay illustrations, too. Now that the ice is broken, I hope for more Howard in the future.

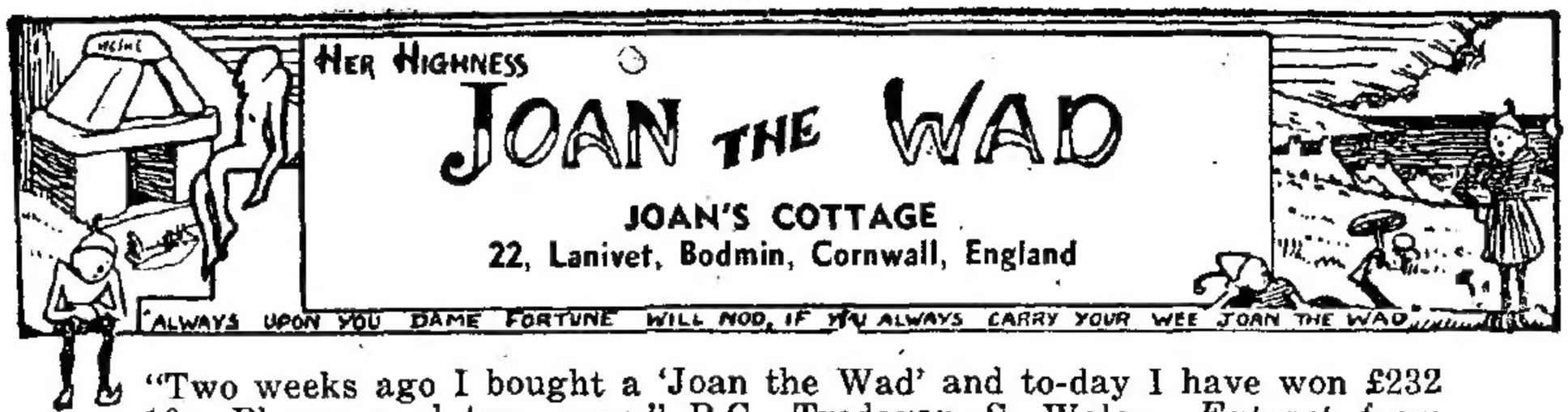
Oh, what a discovery! There are no less than *seven* novels by Jack Mann-E. Charles Vivian which have not been reprinted in F.F.M.!

Thank you again for all you have done in the past to make my fantasy enjoyment, and that of countless others, more complete. May F.F.M. endure as long as there remain people to read it (and that, I'm sure, comes as close to being forever as anything does).

Robert E. Briney.

561 West Western Ave.
Muskegon, Mich.

(Continued on page 8)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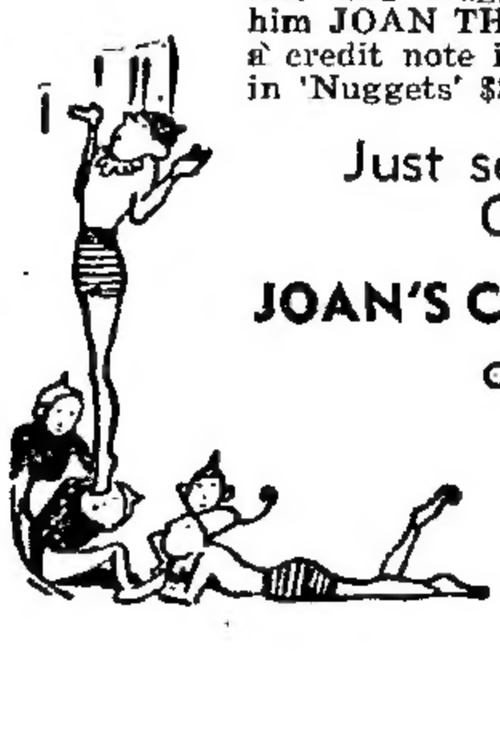

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(Continued from page 6)

FLEMING HEARS FROM AUTHOR

I am enclosing a letter from T. S. Stribling. It is short, but perhaps the fans who liked "The Green Splotches" might enjoy it. Since the December issue containing their comments hasn't come out at this writing, I don't know yet how the fans liked it, but many of them enjoyed it, I'm sure.

From reading the letter I would say that Stribling is too modest about his own great abilities.

I think you should have one short story issue per year. I would like to see you reprint the book, "The King in Yellow", by Robert Chambers, which is a series of connected short stories and very scarce. An F.F.M. reprint of the complete book would be quite a collector's item.

Even a paper-covered English version would be a treasure.

Be glad to hear from fans with ideas on this subject.

Jim Fleming

Box 173,
Sharon, Kansas.

MR. STRIBLING'S LETTER TO FLEMING

Dear Jim:

I am afraid I haven't written any other science fiction except an old story called "Web of the Sun" which came out in *Adventure* long, long ago. It has been reprinted since, I believe, but I don't remember where.

No, I don't contemplate a sequel to "Green Splotches." I have left that mood long ago.

I'm afraid you'll have to do without a picture of me. However, a reporter for the *Tennessean* (Nashville) said he was coming to interview me, and if he takes a picture of me, which I don't think he will, I'll have him send you a copy of the paper.

I have written and published about sixteen novels, I believe, and I don't know how many short stories.

When you go to a big city some time drop in at the public library and look for my name under fiction. You will probably find some titles. Don't bother to look for the volumes in the book stories, they are all out of print.

I have a few mss. unpublished. At present I am writing a philosophy. My private opinion is that the philosophy will remain unpublished.

I rather imagine that you want to write yourself. The only thing to do is to begin making up stories and writing them the best you can. A fiction course at some university is supposed to help. Whether it does or not, blest if I know.

Thank you for the magazine, and I will be interested in hearing what the readers think of "Green Splotches." Tell your English friend I appreciate his admiration for "Green Splotches" but I don't deserve it. I just happened to hit on a resemblance to a modern space ship, I didn't think it out.

All good wishes,

T. S. Stribling.

Editor's Note: The English friend of Jim's referred to by Mr. Stribling is Gilbert Collins. We published Mr. Collins' letter to Jim in the December issue.

ENJOYED ROHMER'S STORY

My wife and I have long been admirers of Sax Rohmer and were very pleased to find his story, "The Bat Flies Low," in the October issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.* We do hope that we may have the pleasure of reading more stories by this famous mystery story writer in future issues of this magazine. In our estimation he is "tops."

John C. Denny.

3512 Charles St.,
Omaha 3, Neb.

WANTS STRAIGHT FANTASY

I was more than pleased when I noted that you'd be coming up with a fine story from one of the true masters of fantasy in the December issue of F.F.M.: Robert E. Howard's "Skull Face". Sturgeon's "Killdozer" is a clever classic of science fiction, but I would prefer seeing you restrict F.F.M. to straight fantasy-horror, Lovecraft-Hodgson, and "the world reverting to barbarism", or "lost world" types of stories, since there are hardly any written today.

I cannot too heartily comment on the October F.F.M., which included Sax Rohmer's "The Bat Flies Low", since Rohmer has done finer things in his life, and you could have easily used any one of the number of excellent horror or fantasy classics that he has written. The one you used, however, was definitely not one of Rohmer's best.

Collier's "Thus I Refute Beelzy" was not only written by one of the world's greatest of fantasy exponents, but the story itself ranks as one of the milestones in the field.

The Finlay, incidentally, for the Collier story, was terrific. It seems that with each passing year the great Virgil is turning into more of a finer craftsman than ever. Lawrence wasn't very much up to par with his interiors on pages 41 and 73, though the one he did for the opening pages of the Rohmer novel was very good.

If any of the other readers are interested, I have established a regular Swap-and-Sell service in ST Fantasy magazines and books. I've thousands of items of nearly all descriptions and years in stock, and shall be happy to aid anyone searching for any particular mag or book in the field. Will appreciate anyone dropping me a line, calling in person, or referred by you to me.

FFMously yours,

Calvin Thos. Beck.

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REQUESTING INFORMATION

I am writing "A History of Science Fiction" in collaboration with a well-known pro-editor, and for that reason would like to complete my collection of reference material, especially in the line of rarities.

For one thing, I would like to buy copies of

(Continued on page 106)

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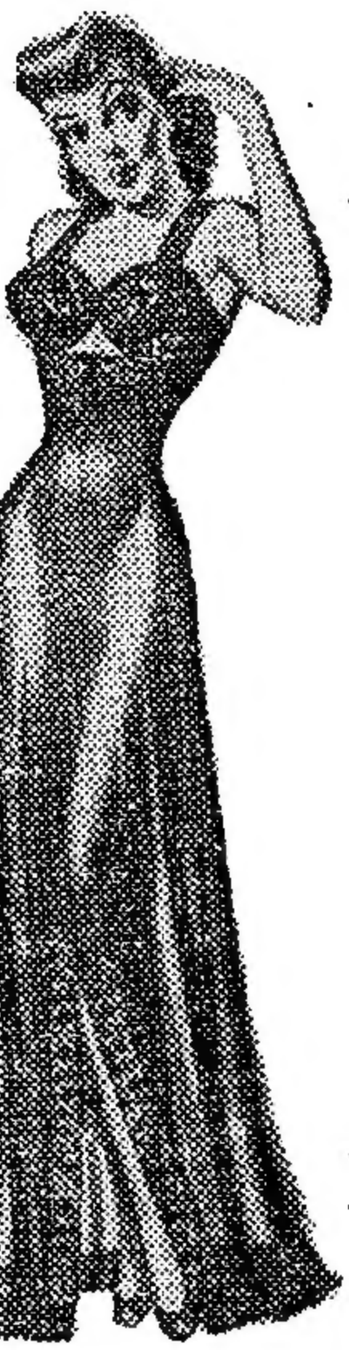

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or your money back

DREAM GIRL FASHIONS, Dept. 292
318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send "Heaven Sent" pajamas at $9.95. If not entirely satisfied, I'll return within 10 days for full cash refund.

( ) I enclose $9.95 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid (I save up to 90c postage). (You may get it at our store too!)

( ) I will pay postman $9.95 plus postage. Check size wanted:

32 34 36 38 40 IN BLACK ONLY
(If you don't know the size send approximate height and weight)

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Black Sorcery

Daring Bare-back She'll be entranced with it

Your Dream girl will be an exquisite vision of allurement, charm, fascination and loveliness in this exotic, bewitching, daring bare-back filmy sheer gown. It's delicate translucent fabric (washes like a dream) will not shrink.
Have Paris at home, with this cleverly designed halter neck that ties or unties at the flick of a finger. Lavishly laced midriff and peek-a-boo bottom. She'll love you for this charm revealing Dream Girl Fashion. In exquisite black sheer.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED
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DREAM GIRL FASHIONS, Dept. 446
318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send BLACK SORCERY gown at $9.95. If not entirely satisfied, I'll return within 10 days for full cash refund.

( ) I enclose $9.95 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid (I save up to 90c postage). (You may get it at our store too!)

( ) I will pay postman $9.95 plus postage. Check size wanted:

32 34 36 38 40 IN BLACK ONLY
(If you don't know the size send approximate height and weight)

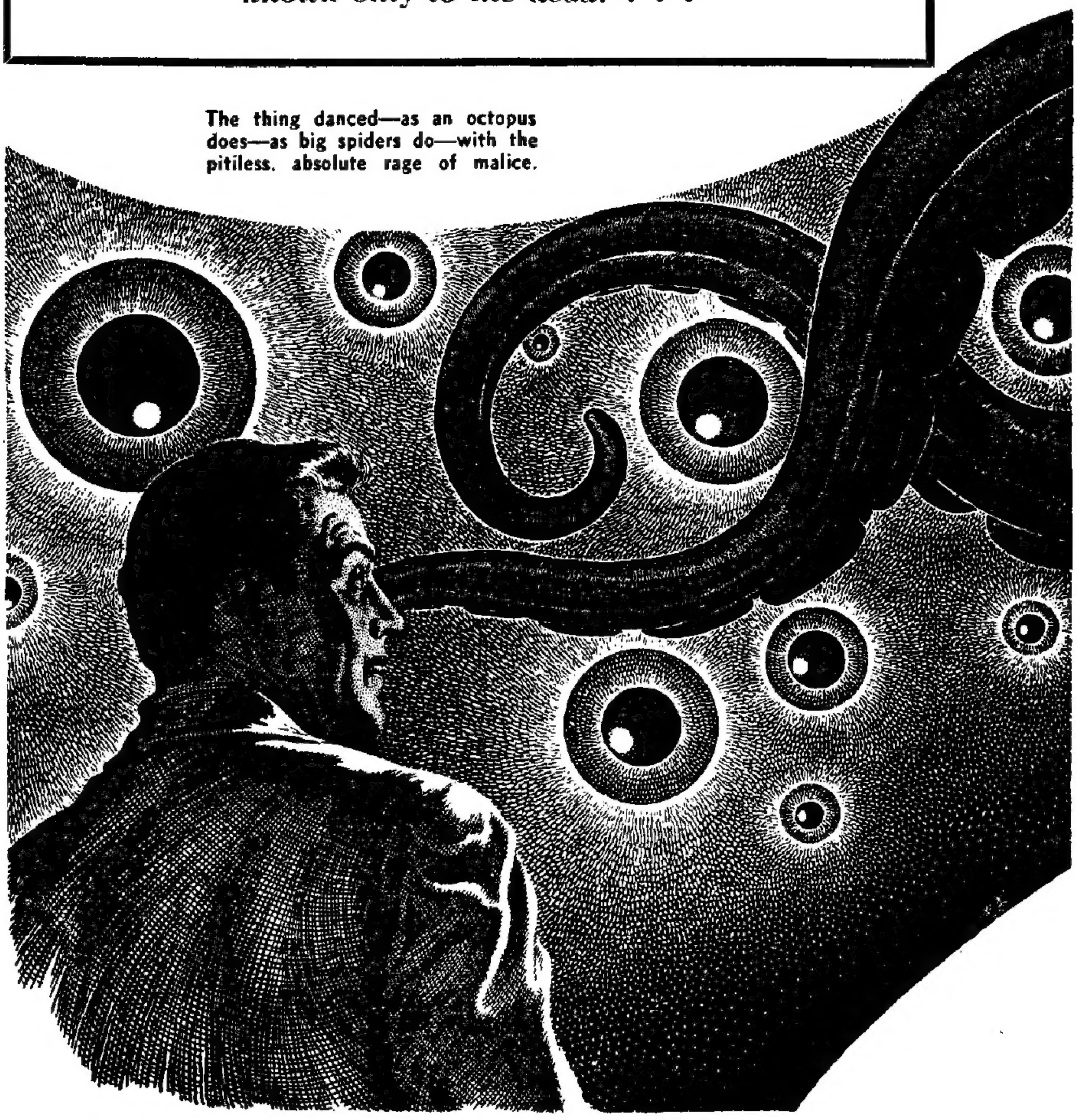
Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

FULL MOON

Into the dark and brooding India that must remain forever secret, Blair Warrender knew that evil magic followed him. . . . Indeed, that his long sought friend might be still living in the mysterious world known only to the dead. . . .



The thing danced—as an octopus does—as big spiders do—with the pitiless, absolute rage of malice.

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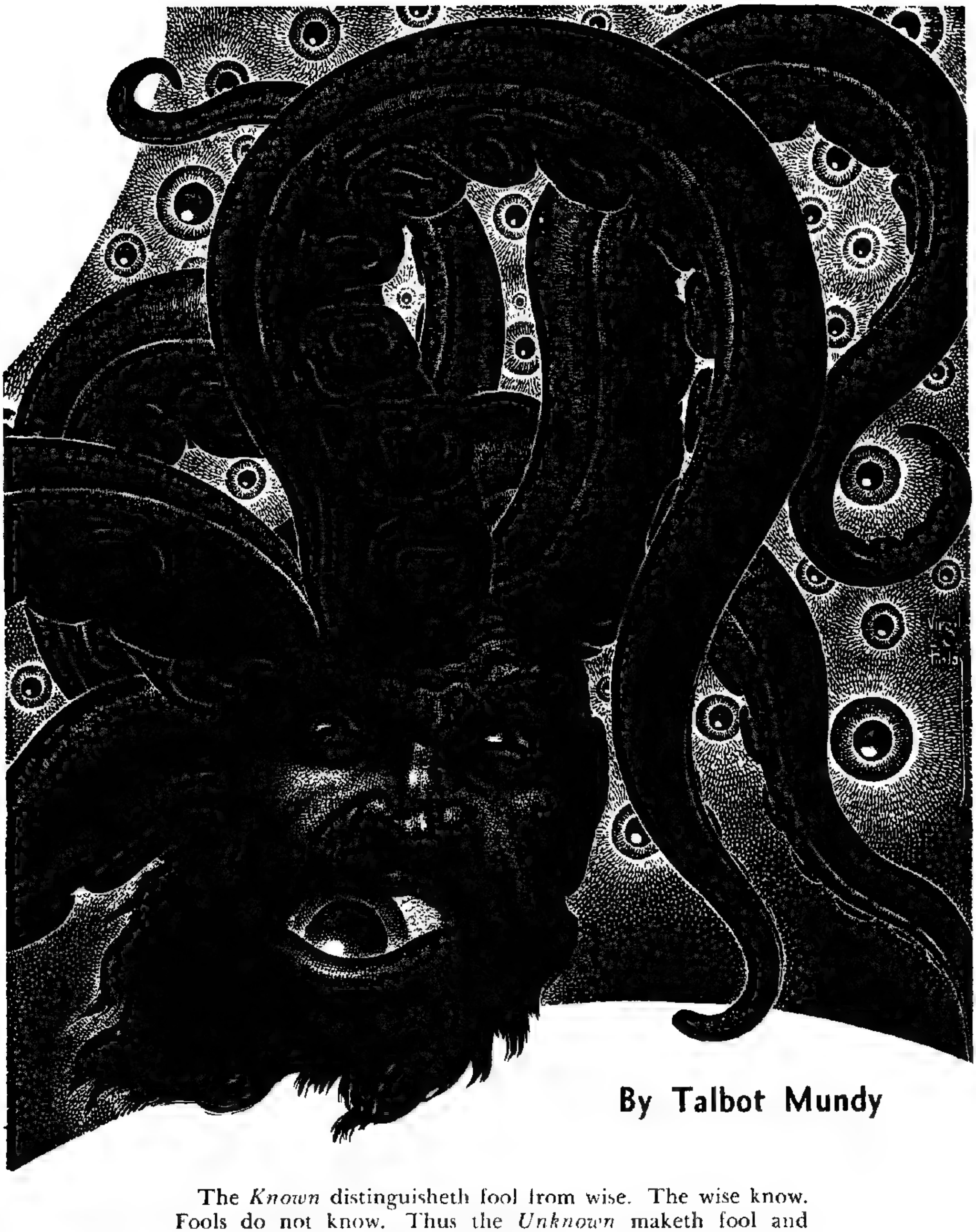


By Talbot Mundy

The *Known* distinguisheth fool from wise. The wise know. Fools do not know. Thus the *Unknown* maketh fool and wiseman equal—for the moment.

—From the First of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

BOMBAY sweltered. The police commissioner's dim-lit library was stifling in spite of electric fans. The night's humidity, the length of a garden, and two streets deadened the clang of tramcars; but there was a rumbling undertone of indrawn rancor. There had been a three-day pause, brooding between riots: passion, momentarily exhausted, redistilled itself at ninety in the shade. But the watch kept. Police headquarters are where the commissioner is, at the end of a telephone. He clicked back the phone on its rest and wiped his forehead; a gray man, with a rather close-clipped gray mustache and heavy eye-

brows over his dark and deep-sunken eyes.

Blair Warrender took the chair opposite and eased his long legs under the table. He was a much younger man, not scared of the commissioner but not quite at ease. The commissioner was an irritating enigma—he was sometimes genial, equally often sardonic. He expected his subordinates to work in the dark and take the blame for accidents. He had a better than usual record for blaming or praising the right man, but he trusted subordinates, according to their view of it, too much or not enough.

He almost never trusted one individual with all the facts of a case. When he called a man by his first name, it might indicate confidence, or it might reveal familiarity that borders on contempt; there was no knowing which. But no one, least of all Blair Warrender, doubted his ability or dreamed of disobeying his orders.

There was a rather new scar on his chin, but nothing very noticeable about Blair Warrender except his eyes. They smoldered. They made some women hate him at sight. Other, wiser women, recognized controlled and consequently deadly anger; some took sporting chances with it. Wiser women yet sought his friendship, dangerous in one sense though it might be. Men found him easy to work with, if rather exacting. He was very neat in a new uniform that he could ill afford; his other one had been torn off his back by Hindus. In the course of routine duty he had saved some of them from being scragged by Moslems, and they had therefore accused him of racial prejudices along with more unmentionable faults; but he was used to that and exasperatingly unresentful.

The table was near one end of the room, where the shaded electric light made the Bokhara hanging look like a bloodstained arras. At the other end of the room, near the door, stood a turbaned servant who had rather Mongolian eyes; when the commissioner, with a cigar in one side of his mouth, grumbled indistinctly and in a low voice that it was the hottest night in ten years, the servant examined the switch of the electric fan. So the commissioner pitched his voice still lower.

"Read this."

He handed Blair Warrender a London daily paper ten days old, blue-penciled at a headline in heavy type:

**INDIA: BRITISH OFFICER MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING.
RUMORED VICTIM OF TERRORISTS.
OFFICIAL SILENCE.**

Blair Warrender read the paragraph—frowned—passed the paper back.

"Frensham," he said, "has been missing for months. According to the League of Nations report about a hundred thousand people vanish every year without trace. The mystery is that the papers didn't learn of this sooner. I suppose this means trouble."

"For you; yes. You find Frensham." The commissioner folded the newspaper, laid it on some other documents and slipped an elastic band over the lot. Then he handed a file of reports across the table. "I need you like the devil here in Bombay, but"—he paused perceptibly, with his eyes on the servant over by the door—"you are to take this case and find Frensham dead or alive."

Blair Warrender scowled over the file, turning the papers rapidly, refreshing memory.

"Nothing new here, sir. We knew all this before Frensham was three days missing—On leave in Rajputana—vanished—trunk in his bedroom at the Kaiser-i Hind Hotel at Mount Abu found cut open and looted of unknown contents—one servant, said to be deaf-and dumb, also missing—the other servant paid off, sent home and knows nothing. Private affairs apparently in order—no money trouble—no debts—no known enemies—health good—no probable reason for suicide. Nothing new in that file."

"Did you notice the date?"

"The eleventh."

The commissioner pushed a calendar across the table. "Notice anything else?"

"No. The calendar says full moon on the fifteenth, but what of it?"

"Bear that in mind. Leaving Mount Abu on horseback, riding leisurely, a man might reach Gaglajung in three days. There is an unconfirmed and unreliable report that a man who might be David Frensham was seen on foot, not far from Gaglajung, on the late afternoon of the fourteenth."

"Why should he go there?"

"That's for you to find out. Frensham's friend at Doongar, which is near Gaglajung, is a Mohammedan named Abdurrahman Khan. He's a quite unimpeachable gentleman, aged seventy—ex-rissaldar of irregular horse—three medals—five bars—*persona grata*: Old and innocuous. He might have supplied a horse or two; he has them. Night, near the full of the moon, in Rajputana, is the best time to travel, and horses that reached Mount Abu by night and left the same night might not be noticed.

"Abdurrahman Khan may have liked Frensham as much as I did. He'd be capable of doing what he was asked, and saying nothing. Men of his type, expecting to die soon, have a way of letting secrets die with them. You won't get much out of him, but you may get

something, if you're careful and don't ask questions."

WARRENDER lit a cigarette and glanced in a mirror to see why the commissioner kept watching the servant, but the glance told him nothing. "Abdurrahman Khan may already have been questioned," he said.

The commissioner nodded. "Yes. If so, he'll tell nothing at all." He took his eyes off the servant at last and looked straight at Blair. "But there are some scattered facts worth noting. For instance, Frensham had a photograph of Wu Tu among his private papers."

Blair scowled at that. "Who hasn't? Wu Tu advertizes herself like a film-star."

"Know what her name means?"

"Yes—Chinese for 'Five Poisons.'"

"Right. Wu Tu may have murdered Frensham."

Blair Warrender held his tongue. He had suggested investigating Wu Tu months ago, but no one who was even half-wise reminded the commissioner about advice that he had seen fit not to take.

"David Frensham," the commissioner continued, "has been my intimate personal friend for going on thirty years. His wife died more than twenty years ago. Aside from his personal kindliness, he was a charming lunatic or a great genius, either or perhaps both. An omnivorous reader—student of archaeology and ancient languages—mathematician—philosopher. He used to read Charles Fort's books. Nothing delighted him more than to prove Charles Fort right and everybody else wrong. Do you know Fort's books?"

"Yes. His daughter Henrietta lent them to me."

"That's another clue. Keep that also in mind. So far, you've the new moon on the fifteenth—Gaglajung, where a charcoal-burner said he saw a man who might be Frensham—Abdurrahman Khan, who may have provided horses—Wu Tu's photograph—Charles Fort's books and Frensham's known delight in Indian magic. That's stuff that no soldier should tackle, although soldiers are the ones who seem most interested. It gets them a 'rep' for being unreliable and shuts them off from promotion. Headquarters were always glad to let Frensham wander off investigating one thing or another. As an Engineer officer he had plenty of opportunities for that, and he did some decent Intelligence work. But he couldn't let magic alone. Secret Service File FF is half-choked with his reports on that stuff."

Blair Warrender smiled. "Do you believe in magic?"

"I am not saying what I believe. That file is raw material for scientific study, I don't mind telling you. It contains stories from men returned from Himalayan expeditions that would make your hair stand on end. Frensham believed magic is the crumbled remnants of an ancient science. That's a clue to his disappearance."

"As you say, sir. I know nothing about magic."

"Nor I, except what David Frensham told me." The commissioner dropped his voice even lower. "But don't forget that some people think they do know. I'm about to introduce you to a man who thinks he does; whether he does or doesn't is beside the point. Study him." His eyes were again on the servant, but his right hand went into a steel box on the table. He groped in it among docketed papers. Deliberately, slowly, he produced what looked like a block of gold, seven or eight inches long by about half that breadth and depth. "Look at it," he said. "Take hold of it."

It was heavy. Blair weighed it in both hands—examined it narrowly, thumbing a corner where a very small piece had been sawn or chipped off.

"I did that," said the commissioner. "Had it analyzed. Almost pure gold. Something less than one half of one per cent of an unknown alloy that makes it harder than cast iron. But it seems to became permanently soft, like ordinary gold, after being melted two or three times."

Blair Warrender's eyes betrayed a vague excitement. "Pure gold?" he said. "No, not heavy enough."

"Shake it."

The thing was hollow. He could feel but not hear movement of something loose inside it.

"Well?" he demanded. It made him angry to have traps set for his curiosity; he was not a baby being set conundrums. The commissioner noticed that. He seemed amused. He spoke almost absent-mindedly.

"I don't know what it is. The microscope reveals no joint, welding or anything like that." He was no longer looking at Blair. He got up, stared at the servant near the door, walked over to him and spoke in English.

"You're a patient rogue. Come and look at it. Let me see you take it in your hands."

The servant's ivory-yellow face revealed no other emotion than a slight and hardly visible alertness. He was a big, upstanding man with heavy neck and shoulders, handsomely ugly, broad-nosed, intelligent looking, and probably almost strong enough to fell an ox with his fist. But the humid heat of Bombay had rather slackened his stance. He was sweating.

"What is it? Look at it. Hold it. Speak!" the commissioner ordered.

The man's face grinned with sudden wrinkles, and each wrinkle seemed to hide a secret. He turned the block over and over in his hands. It appeared to excite him but to make him cautious. He conquered the excitement, let the wrinkles die, and shook his head.

"Not knowing—knowing nothing about this," he said, in English that appeared intentionally mispronounced. Then he shut up—eyes, mouth, attitude. The commissioner seized his wrist and felt his pulse; then he ordered him out of the room. When he had gone he chose a fresh cigar, sat down and said:

"Pulse normal. Calls himself Taron Ling—came to me from a place called Naga Kulu in the Northern Punjab. He had one of the most beautifully forged testimonials I have ever seen. I took him on to find out what his game is."

"Do you know now?"

"No more than I know how Frensham vanished. But I know Taron Ling is a crook, a hypnotist and a spy, for or against Wu Tu, I don't know which. I know he wants, but I don't know why he wants, this gold brick. He knows now that I know he wants it. So perhaps he'll chuck trying to steal it, and bolt. If he doesn't, I'll scare him properly. I want him to bolt. I want him followed."

Blair Warrender nodded doubtfully. He knew the odds in favor of a fugitive through Indian crowds, with most men and—worse yet, women—aiding or benevolently neutral. Nobody aids the pursuing police except from the thoroughly unreliable motives of fear or revenge. But it was no use discussing that; the commissioner would do as he pleased; he always did.

THE commissioner put the gold block back into the steel box and locked it. "It's Frensham's, I think. It was found in the possession of a Punjabi Moslem, who was badly savaged in the riot last Thursday afternoon. He died the same night without giving his name or saying anything. But he was identified the following morning as the man who murdered Henrietta Frensham's ex-chauffeur, who had left her, rather more than two months ago, without giving notice. She reported the loss of this thing—woman-fashion—vaguely. She described it as a hollow block made of yellow metal, gave approximate dimensions and said it had been stolen from a suitcase in her bedroom. I have thought of opening it."

"Why not, sir?"

"Several reasons. It may belong to Frensham, and Frensham may still be alive. If it's Henrietta's, it should be opened in her presence; but she would then know we have it, and I don't want her to know, not just yet. It would be simple, of course, to pretend it was open when found, but—I've a notion the contents have nothing to do with the case, although the thing itself may be immensely important."

"No idea what's in it?"

"Not an idea. But I've taken two really expert opinions—E. O. Tate and Grish Mukerji. For a wonder they agree. It may be older than the hills. I'm not exaggerating. Unofficially—meaning I'm not to be quoted—I'm one of the naïve few who agree with the Theosophists and David Frensham and some other cranks that our chronology is all wrong. Hindu chronology may be nearer right by millions of years. This gold block may be antediluvian, to use a convenient phrase. It was put together as mysteriously as a hen puts the shell on an egg.

"It may be of enormous scientific interest, and my theory is that David Frensham found it and went looking for more. Whoever opens it should shave off one end by fractions of a millimeter at a time and examine each slice microscopically. That would take a long time, and there are very few who could do it. But let me tell you about the man I sent out of the room."

He walked to the door, opened it suddenly, strode into the passage, returned and locked the door behind him. Then the phone rang, and for a few minutes he sat at his desk in conversation with the office at headquarters.

Blair sat uncomfortably, smoked irritably, knocking the ash from his cigarette with jerks that sent it flying two or three feet accurately into the brass tray on the desk. The commissioner prolonged the phone conversation, watching him, judging him while he talked. At last he clicked the receiver in place and began:

"Taron Ling is a Tai from somewhere near the Salween country, but he doesn't know I know that. His testimonial was forged, in the name of the Rajah of Kulu's chief minister, by Dur-i-Duran Singh of Nagu Kulu. He is one of Wu Tu's intimates, another spy. It's always important to watch the bank accounts of such people. Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu, Wu Tu of Bombay, and Zaman Ali the horse-dealer have been banking too much money.

"It's usual at this time of year for Wu Tu to send money to Paris, Brussels, London and Shanghai; she is very wealthy, and she understands foreign exchange. But she has been dealing secretly in bullion. So has Zaman Ali. So has Dur-i-Duran Singh, who has had the colossal impudence to send this fellow

Taron Ling into my household to spy on me.

"Taron Ling, mind you, is a hypnotist of more than ordinary skill."

Blair grinned. "Did he hypnotize you?"

"No. I'm putting you on guard against him. Wu Tu is another hypnotist. Dur-i-Duran Singh is a third. I warn you: if you're drunk, or drugged, or tired out, or if conditions are in other ways suitable, such people can make you imagine anything whatever, that you ever saw, that made a deep impression on you. That's the secret of most of the ghosts people see; they're freaks of memory, exaggerated by emotion. Men like Taron Ling can make you see 'em."

"But why me, sir?"

"Intuition is usually lazy thinking, eye-washed up to look like brain-work. However, intuition tells me you're the best man for this job, and I'm being guided by it. Weren't you once engaged to Henrietta Frensham?"

"No, sir." Blair's eyes came as close to an explosive oath as eyes can.

"Thought of it, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why not?"

"Private reasons."

"Tell 'em."

THERE was a pause. In Blair Warrender's eyes there was no surrender. His personal views and his personal conduct were not subjects for discussion unless they qualified or limited his behavior in the course of duty. Did they? The commissioner—observing, smiling, chewed an unlighted cigar—met him halfway.

"I suspect her of being concerned in this. Now then. Go on. Tell me."

"I wasn't in love."

"Oh?"

"No, sir, I wasn't."

"Pretty close to it?"

"Yes."

"Then why not?"

"Don't like mystery, for one thing. For another, I took exception to her warning me against Wu Tu. I don't know how it came to Henrietta's knowledge that I had to see Wu Tu in the course of duty. But she asked me about it. I showed her a sketch I'd made of Wu Tu, who posed for it, two or three hours. As a matter of general interest I told Henrietta about Wu Tu being a British subject, of mixed Chinese-Sikh-Portuguese-French parentage. I probably also told her that Wu Tu is one of the most intelligent and fascinating women in the world."

The commissioner nodded. "That was no exaggeration. Go on. What happened?"

"Nothing definite. But Henrietta warned me I was under Wu Tu's influence. I resented it, but that probably wouldn't have mattered. However, when I denied it, she didn't believe me, and that did matter."

"Yes, yes. You've a temper. Go on."

"That's all. I'm very fond of Henrietta. But I don't like mystery, and she's mysterious. I don't like being disbelieved. And I don't care to make love to a woman unless I love her. Possibly I funked it. Anyhow, I put in for leave, as you know."

"And instead of getting it, you were sent to track Zaman Ali. Did it skilfully, too. Good God, if I'd given you leave you'd have moped and caught the plague or something! Tracking Zaman Ali from Peshawar kept your mind off love, I'll warrant! Did I ever mention to you that she's my god-child?"

"No, sir. What does that amount to?"

The commissioner threw away his cigar and chose another. "Damned if I know. Ask the bishop. But I always believe what she tells me, especially when she doesn't tell, if you get my meaning. We had some conversation about you."

"What did she say?" Blair's eyes were smoldering fires of governed anger.

"She's in love with you." The commissioner struck a match and carefully applied it to the end of his cigar. He took his time about it. Then, "The last time David Frensham dined with me, he mentioned it. He said he'd like you for a son-in-law."

"None of his damned business!"

"So I told him. I volunteered the opinion that Henrietta should marry her equal, if there is one. I said you're not nearly good enough, and I'm still of the same opinion."

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it. I'm sending you to spy on Henrietta Frensham."

Blair stiffened, but the furious light in his eyes grew suddenly subdued. He looked calm, as almost always when he sensed a crisis. He could govern himself with a will of iron.

"For God's sake, why me, sir?"

"Because she's in love with you."

"I call that a good reason for putting another man on the case. I can't in common decency—"

The commissioner interrupted; "It's the nearest thing to decency at my disposal in the circumstances. She is my godchild and Frensham's daughter, under more than suspicion of knowing something which she is more likely to tell you than anyone else. David Frensham was a strange chap, and in some ways simple-minded. I don't entirely exclude the possibility of his having been tricked into some sort of criminal escapade. Henrietta may know that. Find out."

"Damn!" Blair muttered.

"All the same, go and do it. But I've another reason. I believe in offering fish the bait they fancy, and my information is that Wu Tu wants to see you."

"Who said so?"

"Chetusingh. I have had him on this case ever since Frensham vanished. For some reason that I can't guess, Wu Tu has a trap set ready for you; I'm almost as sure of that as that you're sitting here. I propose you shall walk straight into it. She's rather desperate, but I don't think dangerous—to you—at the moment."

"In what way desperate?"

The commissioner loved to parade a worldly wisdom cloaked in unexpected phrases. He smiled, knocked the ash from his cigar and sat back in his chair. "Did you ever hear of the law of diminishing returns? Wu Tu's profits have been prodigious. I don't mean merely cash, although she's very wealthy; she's a money-lender and a very skilful mistress of intrigue. She has used her money to get influence, and the influence to get more money.

"She's an artist at blackmail, and loves it. But the law of diminishing returns takes care of everything that overreaches itself, and Wu Tu sees the writing on the wall. Her kind of fortune crumbles very rapidly when rot sets in, and she's wise enough to know it. But she's fool enough to squander her money on yogis, mediums, alchemists, astrologers—charlatans of all sorts. She is afraid of age, afraid to die; even more afraid of what her enemies will do to her when the reins of her intrigues get out of hand and the luck begins to flow backward. She can see that coming—knows she's losing her grip. She's a long way from being the first to scour the world for a philosopher's stone, but she has carried it to greater extremes than most people can afford. That's how she first came to know Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu, who claims to have studied alchemy in Tibet. She has sometimes as many as twenty agents scouring the Himalayas at her expense for occult secrets."

"Suppose she knows any?"

"Yes, for what they're worth. Most of them are not worth much. But I suspect that this time she is after something big, which Frensham may have discovered. And she may have murdered Frensham or, more likely, caused him to be murdered. There are rumors; I'm sick of hearing them. That gold block, that you saw just now, in some way is connected with it.

"Henrietta, I think, must have had it from David Frensham. Taron Ling, instructed by Dur-i-Duran Singh, and in touch with Wu Tu and Zaman Ali, traced it into my possession and tried to steal it. That ties them all up together, but we won't bother about Dur-i-Duran Singh for the moment. Let's catch Wu Tu first, and a whole house of cards may come tumbling."

Blair objected. "Henrietta might have had that gold block in her suitcase, and known nothing about it. The way she reported its loss suggests that."

THE commissioner laid his cigar down, set both clenched fists on the desk and leaned forward. "Henrietta," he said grimly, "knows more than she'll tell. To my certain knowledge she has talked with Wu Tu. That may sound unlikely, but I know it happened. Now she's in Rajputana, staying with the Graynes, in camp near Gaglajung. Do you know the Graynes?"

"Yes." Blair looked noncommittal. The commissioner continued:

"Grayne's a decent fellow, but a bit slack. Writes ridiculous plays in his spare time. Has a Christian Science aunt in the United States, who sends him checks and pamphlets. His wife cashes the checks and burns the pamphlets. Between the two of them I'd say they'd let a brass band go by without knowing which way it went. Grayne being on long leave, is probably composing poetry and noticing less than usual. I'm sending you there to find out why Henrietta invited herself to stay in the Graynes' camp. Visit Wu Tu first."

"When?"

"To-night. I will have her house surrounded in case of accident. But mind, no accidents! I want facts, not fireworks. I don't want her arrested. I want her to bolt. If there's a trap, walk straight into it and use your wits. I've a suspicion I know why Wu Tu wants you, and if I'm right you're in no immediate danger. You may be kidnaped. If not, make for Gaglajung by train to-morrow morning. I'll wire Mount Abu and have a proper *bandobast* all ready waiting for you at Abu Road Station. Take your time about reaching Gaglajung -camp close to villages each night and encourage gossip—learn all you can before you get there."

Blair scowled. "I would rather go to hell than force myself on Henrietta."

"Yes, hell may have its compensations. You'll be gazetted as on special leave, from to-morrow morning. Use the new code for telegrams. Keep me posted."

"Do I work alone, sir?"

"Howland of the C.I.D. will keep in close touch with you with two or three of his men, so look out for signals. I will have Y-Six and Y-Eighty-one on your heels; they won't let you out of sight for a minute, once you reach

Gaglajung. And you're to work with Chetusingh."

"I'd rather pick my own man."

"What's wrong with Chetusingh? You trained him. He knows more about this than you do."

"That's the trouble. He's a bit inclined to rush his fences. He and I work better when he knows less and listens to me."

"He has orders to work with you, but to take his own line if he thinks that necessary. Pick him up at the Afghan Dera; he'll go with you to-night. Better not go in uniform. Chetusingh is playing Pathan. You'd better do the same. Wu Tu will see through it at once, but it will make you less noticeable getting into the house, and once you're in it won't matter. Here are two special passes; I've a very special reason for your using them. They're bait for Zaman Ali. Don't get killed now. You're a valuable man. And don't forget: Facts not fireworks! Colonel—let's see, no, they'd just gazetted him a brigadier—Brigadier General David Frensham alive or dead! What happened to him—how—when—where? Hold your tongue, learn all you can, and keep me posted. Good night, Blair my boy, and good luck."

Blair Warrender shook hands and walked out, cursing his luck in silence. It was bad enough that the commissioner almost never told more than half what he knew; one had to work more or less in the dark and learn to like it. But to have to thrust himself on Henrietta Frensham and invade her privacy—extract her secrets—spy on her—

"Good God! I supposed I'd never see her again. Well, orders are orders. Here goes."

He sent to his quarters, tubbed, changed and went to the Byculla Club, where he dined with a bishop.

Chapter Two

> Though the end of my fate be tears, saith the widow, shall I take the end for the beginning? Short though this life be, I will laugh while I may, and not know sorrow only.
>
> —From the Ninth (unfinished) Book of Noor Ali.

THE bishop did his best to understand Blair Warrender. They sprawled in deep chairs in the starlight. The bishop wiped sweat from his face. Warrender ordered a drink from a soft-footed servant in ghost-white and did his utmost to explain himself.

"I'm a policeman. I'm not in politics. It's my job to try to understand what's going on. I'm not permitted prejudices."

"All the same, you have them," said the bishop. "Mind you, we're not discussing religion, or even conventions, least of all politics. But surely you are prejudiced against the type of woman represented by this Wu Tu? There is no worse public danger."

Warrender signed the chit for the drink with his left hand; his right was feeling in his pocket. He pulled out a sketch done in crayon.

"The woman you have in mind," he said, "looks something like this. Her place is a sort of vacation resort, a pleasure palace, if you wish to call it that, where she herself presides. Her real purpose is political intrigue, and, through it, power for herself.

There was rather a long pause while the bishop examined the sketch. "If she's like that," he said, "one can imagine her hold over Chetusingh. But that only makes it more difficult. I am asking you to save him from her. What is that woman—Chinese?"

"No. The sketch exaggerates the Chinese touch, although it's there. She is Portuguese-Chinese-Sikh-French—born in Hongkong. She's a British subject. Anything else you'd care to know about her? I could tell you her bank balance and the names of her correspondents in Berlin, New York, Paris. Or about the young Chinese widows who help her to entertain."

The bishop stirred uneasily. "These racial mixtures almost baffle one's hope for humanity! If she looks like that she should be at Hollywood playing vampire parts. Beautiful, yes. But that's the pity of it. She suggests to me an octopus. She reached out one subtly mysterious tentacle and drew Chetusingh into her maw. May God have mercy on him."

"What do you propose?" asked Warrender. "There's no law I know of against a woman being beautiful and witty."

The bishop handed the sketch back. "Who drew that?"

"I did."

"Possibly you, too, admire her too much. You didn't do that from memory. She must have posed to you for it. Well, you have talent."

"In my profession," said Warrender, "all a fellow's talents come in usefully. Besides, there's the inevitable retirement to bear in mind. When my day comes to draw a pension I mean to take up painting—and live. I'd rather be a duffer at that than die of boredom. However, what do you suggest?" He returned the sketch to his pocket.

"Less reprehensible people than Wu Tu are in prison," the bishop answered at last. "Such

women break laws when it suits them. By breaking down character they induce other people to break laws. Like you, I am not in politics. But she is. It happens I know that. I have been told so by perplexed Indian Christians, who come to me for advice on their personal problems. To be in her kind of politics, but out of prison, suggests to me—I can only say tolerance on the part of the police. That may be convenient for the moment. It probably is. But—"

There was another long pause. The anger in Blair's eyes became less latent, but he sat still. The bishop again mopped the sweat from his face; then he drew out a cigar case, opened it, snapped it shut and returned it to his pocket without taking a cigar. "You are Chetusingh's friend," he said, "and he yours. I know you are his hero. He has admitted that to me many times in my house, before this Jezebel got hold of him. You have your public duty to perform, of course. But you are one of the few men in India to whom a wide discretion in the course of duty is absolutely necessary, and is therefore permitted.

"It would be useless to deny that; I know it is true. What higher duty have you than you owe to a friend and comrade of an alien race, who has adopted our religion, in the teeth of a malignant opposition from his family and from his whole clan, simply because he admired our principles and our adherence to them? You can save Chetusingh from that woman by using your authority against her. Do it, Warrender, in the name of common decency, if for no other reason."

"Have you spoken with Chetusingh?" Blair asked him.

"Yes. But I haven't his confidence since he fell into that woman's clutches. He used to ask my advice. Now, on the rare occasions when I see him, he is either flippant or silent and, I think, resentful."

"Rajput pride is touchy stuff," said Blair. "You may have flicked him on the raw." He passed his cigarette case to the bishop and their eyes met straight for a moment. His were baffling, although the bishop's were as easy to understand as plain print; he was hiding nothing. "I will do what I can," he said after a moment, and there was nothing obscure about that remark. It was a full stop.

"Bless you," said the bishop. He lighted the cigarette. The flame of the match revealed embarrassment as he snatched at thought after thought for a change of subject. "By the way," he asked offhandedly, "any news about Brigadier-General Frensham?"

"No."

"They tell me it's in headlines in the London papers."

"Yes."

"Three months missing, and no trace—no clues—is it another of these insoluble mysteries?"

"Perhaps," said Blair. "Good night, sir."

"Good night. You forgive my confidences?"

"Nothing to forgive. I won't discuss them."

"Sphynx! Well—I enjoyed the dinner immensely. Good night."

BLAIR walked to police headquarters, answering the salutes of constables on duty with a nod and a stare that seemed to act like a tonic. They stiffened. Responsibility in some way sat more valiantly on their shoulders for having seen him. At headquarters, Indian subordinates stirred as a tuning-fork answers a master-tone. He spoke to one dark-eyed veteran, who stood at ease with the familiarity of friendship, and who nodded—deep unto deep.

"All has been ready," the Indian answered, "since the chief telephoned at eight-thirty."

Later, at nearly eleven o'clock, a Pathan walked out, muttering, through the side-street entrance to the detention cells. It was an unusual hour, but he could hardly be anything else than a released prisoner. He swaggered with the sulky-jaunty truculence of a Pathan recovering lost dignity, but he looked rather lost and feckless without a weapon.

He thrust his way between the passers-by, and took the street past the King Edward Memorial Hospital toward the *dera* of the Kabuli Afghans, where the horse-traders stay who come down from the North to sell fat-rumped ponies to inexperienced British subalterns, and to spread through teeming slums and credulous bazaars amazing tales of Northern Asia in arms. As he stood for a moment etched and shadowed by the naked electric light outside the *dera* entrance, a bearded Afghan, on his way out of the *dera*, paused and stared.

"By God, what wonders next?" the Afghan exclaimed. "O Ismail, what knife feud brought thee hither? It was in Poona I last saw thee. Was the Poona hasheesh too strong? Or did the Sellers of Delights neglect thee when they had thy money? What now?"

"Get thee back to Kabul, to thy wife!" Ismail retorted. He pushed past the Afghan, swaggering through into the shadowy saddle-and-spice smell of the *dera*, vanishing along a corridor, under a stairway. A key that creaked noisily turned behind him. Then the Afghan followed and stood listening, but all he heard was the thump of a mattress or something like it against the door on the inside. He could see nothing through the keyhole, so he went away about his business with the

slippered, awkward gait of a middle-aged man who has spent two thirds of his life on horse- or camel-back.

Near midnight, he whom the Afghan had addressed as Ismail walked out of the *dera* with another Pathan and the two walked solemnly along the empty streets until they reached the dismal quarter where the mill-hands sleep like corpses in the gutter; thence, on through even narrower, shuttered and winding alley-ways toward a more prosperous section, where a Hindu temple loomed, its shadow lit by little lamps that looked choked by the hot dark.

Near there a police patrol stopped them; it was only three days since some Moslems had butchered a sacred cow in that temple entrance, and there are more ways than that of defiling Hindu temple steps. But both men showed passes, and the signature on them worked like magic. The police did not even wait to watch which way they went.

They took a rather wider street, where tired trees loomed against the stars. Near the end of the street they made peculiar signals on the door of a balconied house. There were beggars lurking in the shadows, as always near such houses; some of them stirred like graveyard ghouls, observed for a moment and then dozed again; they wasted no importunity on Pathan night errants. But there was one near the door, all eyes, amid smelly rags, in shadow. He might be a Bauriah—one of the criminal tribe that shams asceticism to impose on poetry. He spoke:

"Protectors of the poor, nine who have entered this house gave me nothing. The All-knowing seeth. The All-seeing knoweth. Alms! Alms!"

"Allah is all around thee! Allah protect thee! Await His pleasure!" answered the Pathan who had been addressed as Ismail. He gave him nothing.

The heavy door opened inward cautiously. The two passed in, in silence, into darkness, standing still until the outer door was shut and bolted at their backs. Then an inner door opened suddenly into an electric lighted hall, where a number of low-caste, well-dressed servants lurked around a heavy wooden stairway, and on the tiles, beside a heavy mat, was a row of slippers, some new, some old, but none of Bombay craftsmanship. Both Pathans kicked off their footgear; he knew as Ismail tripped on the mat, uncovering a pair of imported brown-and-white shoes that looked incongrous in that place, but he appeared not to notice them.

"See that I get my own again," he ordered, scowling so fiercely that the custodian of slippers cringed. Then he led up the dark teak stairway without ceremony. But a drumstick, pulled by a cord from below, thumped on a gong up above to announce him, and a door at the stair-head opened before he reached it.

A young Chinese girl, as insolent as fate, in a jacket and trousers of blue-and-amber flowered silk, confronted him beneath a gilded dragon. Behind her, down a long corridor, there was mandarin-palace loot—jade—crystal—lacquer—gossamer curtains—rose-hued light from hidden electric blubs—a smell of sandalwood—a haze of incense—weird, dim music.

She herself looked like an antique, sloe-eyed, with a black fringe straight across her forehead. She was smoking a cigarette in a long jade tube. Her intensely intelligent eyes—no other gesture—observant, indifferent, self-assured—directed both men toward a doorway twenty steps along the corridor on the left hand. She closed the stair-head door behind them and followed, blowing smoke-rings.

The Pathans swaggered through a clattering curtain of metallic beads into a room part Indian, part Chinese, richly carpeted. There was a long, deep divan. On the floor were heaped cushions of gorgeous colors. Opposite the door a gilded dragon-screen concealed one corner; and beside that, on a mandarin's throne, sat the woman who owned the place.

Her age might not be guessed. Good humor and the full flood of physical health obeyed intelligence, concealing all but what she chose should seem; and she was lovelier to the eye than any cream-and-honey quadroon who ever maddened Paris. Forbidden knowledge, that had not wearied her, laughed forth from dark eyes and carmined lips. Eurasian, slim, so marvelously formed and subtly strong that the ease of her poise suggested motion, she was dressed in jet-black silk. The jacket, open at the throat, revealed a daffodil-yellow lining and a throat that Rodin might have thumbed from creamy meerschaum.

A big diamond flashed in her dark hair. Pearls on the lobes of her ears stole glow and color from her skin. She had jade bracelets that clashed when she moved, but no other jewelry; there were no rings on her strong hands, and her hands looked young. But even younger and more graceful were the naked feet that lazed below the black silk, which suggested rather than revealed impudently shapely legs. A hint, but no more than a hint of Chinese hovered near her eyes; they were the eyes of the devil, beautiful with love of dangerous living.

"Hello, Warrender," she said.

"Evening, Wu Tu," he retorted. He seemed undisturbed by being recognized, but her eyes darkened.

"Don't you call me that—you!"

"Very well, don't call me Warrender."

"Blair—eh?"

"I am Ismail ben Alif Khan."

"But why the masquerade? Why don't you come alone to see me? Why bring Chetusingh? Why do you choose to dress like Orakzai Pathans? They fight like dogs and love like pigs, except when they are drunk with hasheesh; then they sleep like stuffed pythons."

"Let me see behind that screen," said Blair. But Chetusingh forestalled him—too late by a stride; as he reached it, a low door hidden by the screen thumped shut and a bolt clicked.

She seemed indifferent. "You have at least the manners of Pathans."

CHETUSINGH moved one wing of the screen away from the wall, so that he could watch the low door. Then he and Blair sat on the divan, drawing their feet up under them. Blair said something in a low voice and Chetusingh went to the curtained door, glancing into the passage both ways, returned and sat down again.

"You are as stupid as Pathans," said Wu Tu. "You know well, Chetusingh, that men are not murdered in my house. I don't permit it. Otherwise, why do you think that a Rajput Chr-r-ristian" (she filled the words with venom) "was here night after night—and no knife in his liver? Tell me."

There was no impatience in her voice—no anger in her eyes, even when Chetusingh smiled without answering. She was only making conversation while she eyed Blair Warrender. It was his smoldering gaze that amused her. She mocked him:

"Take care! Beware of my merry widows!" Weirdly half-heard chords of eastern music from another room counter-pointed the inflection of her voice. "Ismail ben Alif Khan the Orakzai" (her voice and her smile were almost a caress) "is no concern of mine. But Blair—"

She lingered on the word. Her sinuous ease, the scented heat and mellow light wove and again rewove imagined calm; but its weft and its woof were danger, beyond guessing.

"My merry widows shed humility and meekness and all those vices when they left home. Do they care for a Pathan's dignity? What if one of them should pull that turban off and laugh at an Englishman's clipped head?"

"There are nine men here to whom I wish to speak," said Blair abruptly.

"Set a new spy at the outer door! There are ten men. I would not describe them as your bodyguard!" Then she added in the veranacular, "*Diwaza bund hai.*"

The news that the outer door was locked made Chetusingh stir uncomfortably. Wu Tu drew some paper money from her bosom and without glancing at it tossed it into Chetusingh's lap.

"Go and play with the little widows!"

Chetusingh was well taught. He examined the money before he tossed it back to her. Then he glanced at Blair, who nodded. Chetusingh walked out into the corridor and turned left. The Chinese girl parted the curtains, making the beads jingle to attract attention; at the hardly noticeable movement of Wu Tu's hand she withdrew and followed Chetusingh.

"Now you are not afraid to talk to me," said Wu Tu.

"No," he answered.

She drew her legs up under her and arranged a cushion so that she could loll back comfortably.

"Would you like a drink? Smoke? No? Let us be frank with each other."

He smiled. "Jenny, are you ever frank with anybody?"

"Always! But don't *you* call me Jenny. I am that to the fools whom I entertain in my house, and who borrow money from me secretely, and who slip—slip—slip into my power—it would surprise you to know—"

"It wouldn't. You needn't brag about it. I could give you a partial list of your creditors."

"To the Sikhs and the men from the North I am Soonia."

He nodded. "Soonia Singh in Berlin, Paris, New York, Brussels—"

"You know too much. I am Wu Tu to my enemies. To you, Blair—"

"Suit yourself. If you prefer it, I will call you Marie."

"That is my true name—Marie d'Alencon. It is on my passport. Let us talk truth to each other. Why have you stayed away? And why send Chetusingh? Do you think that nine-and-eighty nights ago I let you sketch me—sat to be stared at by your eyes, that torture because they see so much, and burn, and tell me little—do you think I did that for Chetusingh's sake?"

"Do you suppose I came here to make love to you?" he retorted. "Chetusingh was spying on you. You know that."

"Why him? That convert-puritan so careful of his soul that he draws in his breath when he tells unavoidable lies! I tortured him. He would have bored me to death if I had not made trouble for him. I let his bishop know that he has been dealing in unchristian plans."

"Why?"

"Because I know how he feels toward that bishop—as a *chela* toward his *guru*. Yet he

might not explain to the bishop, who feels toward him as *guru* to his *chela*. Are there hotter hooks than that on which to draw a convert?"

"Probably not. What I asked you is, why did you do it?"

"To bring you here. Why else? I could have had him beaten to death in the streets, and none the wiser, but I wanted you here. It wasn't easy" (her eyes smiled reminiscently) "to reach the bishop's ear and make him think he thought of that. But why didn't you come alone? I want you!" She leaned back on the cushion, put her arms behind her head, smiled —and her smile seemed all surrender. "Don't I look good? Don't you like me?"

"Yes. I can like without smashing and grabbing. There are ten men here. What are they doing?"

"People come here for amusement."

"Murder amuse them?"

"Not in my house. If they murder one another, sometimes—elsewhere—that is not strange. When was murder anything but a natural consequence of"—she spoke slowly, almost purring – "intruding – unwisely – amid emotions not understood?"

He got up. "You may as well come with me," he said. "I am going to interview those men."

"Wait!" Her dark eyes suddenly grew liquid with excitement. There was a change in her voice. Beyond, or beneath, or around its luring, lazy sensuousness there was an unguarded overtone of danger, like a wolf's yelp very far off, coming nearer. "Three months ago, when you sketched me, I said—"

"Yes, I know what you said."

"You savage! Blair, your cruel heart glows through your eyes! You love strength. You love nothing else. You are on the side of the law by accident. You have no morals—none, I tell you! You are only loyal. And to what are you loyal? England? You would dread to live in England. You would leave India unless it were a battle-ground for all your talents. You love battle, because it makes you feel your strength, and you are drunk with strength! So to what are you loyal?"

"To the job," he answered.

"Not you! You are loyal to your hunger, just like any other savage! Duty? That is nothing to you except that it means to be strong—stronger—strongest—and then stronger again beyond the dream of devils! That is why you love danger."

"Do I? Well, what of it?"

"Love me! I *am* danger!"

"You love strength in order to corrupt it, Wu Tu."

"Call me Marie! Are you incorruptible? You dare me? Think a minute! I can snap my fingers, Blair, and ruin you."

"Try it," he answered.

"You policeman!" She stood up and faced him, laughing. With a naked foot she kicked his shin, triumphant, daring him. She wasn't afraid of his strength; she craved it. "Love me, you savage! I will give you the keys of India—of Asia! You devil, love me!"

"Savages don't love," he answered. "Give me a cigarette and don't be silly."

He returned to the divan. She followed and sat beside him, curling up at one end with her naked feet toward him. She tossed him her platinum cigarette case.

Chapter Three

Abide thou the time and the tide of events, lest strength go wasted and thy skill, in vain exerted, fall in to the scales against thee. Silence is the arsenal of Wisdom.

—From the First of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

BLAIR examined the cigarette case, pressed the diamond catch, sniffed the cigarettes, selected one and gave the case back. He did not take the first, nor the last, nor the middle one; and before he touched it to his lips he tapped it on the little lacquered table, on which there were a jade vase and a small but monstrous figurine that looked like molded gold.

Wu Tu promptly chose a cigarette at random, lighted it, blew a smoke-ring, laughed and leaned toward him, proffering the lighter. Their eyes met above it. The scent of her reached his nostrils. For a moment she looked older than he did, but that look vanished.

"It is fear of me that poisons you," she murmured. "Not to trust me is as dangerous as not to trust yourself. Blair—"

"Who was behind that screen?" he asked her.

She shrugged indifference. "Probably someone. I have many servants."

"Why did you call me Warrender so promptly when I came in?"

"I was so glad to see you. I should have said Blair, shouldn't I?"

"Somebody behind that screen was listening and passed the news to someone else," he answered. "Why were you scared when I started for the next room?"

"Love me—and be safe," she said, smiling. "Don't I look good? I am even better than I look. Seize the nettle strongly—"

"And the cobra by the throat!" he added.

"Blair, I warn you—you strong, leopard-eyed devil! India isn't safe for one whom—"

He finished the sentence for her: "—Zaman Ali fears! Zaman Ali suspected me as Ismail ben Alif Khan. But now he knows I am Blair Warrender. He knows I am here, and the outer door locked. He knows now who has been watching him. Nine of his accomplices are here to-night, and he knows that Chetusingh, and consequently I, know all their names. He is probably not such a fool as to murder me here, supposing he could do that. But—"

"You don't even know why he is in Bombay," she retorted calmly. "I could tell you. How else can you find out? I can give you Zamin Ali! That pig—" Her eyes flashed. "Blair, you may have for the taking what he craves but is too much of a sot to imagine! Power! You understand me?"

He nodded.

"There isn't a guilty secret worth knowing in all India that I can't tell you."

He nodded again. His eyes did not reveal that he doubted her, if he did.

"Do you understand, too, that you are alive because I wished it? Any crazy failure of a student with a cheap revolver could have shot you and not known who directed him or why he did it. Isn't life good?" She leaned toward him. "You don't guess how good it *can* be!" Her hand touched his. He let his lie still.

"What can you do to Zaman Ali? Arrest him? What would that accomplish? You have no proofs against him that a court would look at. He would soon be at liberty. But you? Death's arm is longer than life's desires! Nobody but I can save you now from Zaman Ali and his gang. But what if I give them to you?"

"When?"

"Love me."

He knocked the ash from his cigarette into the jade vase on the lacquer table, using his left hand. She was fingering his right hand, on the divan. He stared at the golden figurine, whose monstrous, sub-human face seemed wise beyond all emotion; whoever had made it, knew neither love nor hate but only irony.

"Look at me, not at that! You catch sprats, you policemen, but the sharks escape you, because of the laws of evidence, and because you seek peace, not power. I don't seek power. I already have it!"

"And you're wealthy," he suggested, not withdrawing his hand when she raised it to her lap with both hers.

TRIUMPH stole into her eyes. "Blair, have you ever, even for a moment, felt the strength of money—the thrill of the strength of money that obeys you? I have money! Men and women—some of them so important that they dare not risk discovery—owe me more money than you have ever dreamed of having. It is secret, unpayable debts that crack the whips of power. But to you I would not lend. To you I give!

"Blair, why do you look at me in that way? Tell me."

Suddenly his right hand that she fondled seized her wrist and she checked a scream, half terrified but half believing what she hoped. She tried to break his grip, but could not.

"Chetusingh," he said, "should have been back before now. What has happened to him?"

"How do I know? You hurt me! Do you hear, you hurt me! I didn't want that fool in here, so—you savage, let go of my wrist!"

But his grip tightened. She writhed—kicked—and then struck at his face. His turban fell, revealing his crisp-curled gladiator head.

"Scream, why don't you?"

Venom stole into her eyes. Her right hand moved toward her bosom. Suddenly she snatched out a six-inch weapon like a bodkin, dagger-handled. "Damn you—"

She struck. He caught her right wrist in his left hand—twisted it. She kicked with her naked feet. He twisted her wrist steadily until she groaned through set teeth and the loosed weapon thumped to the floor. He held both wrists in one hand then and leaned on her to prevent her from kicking his head as he reached down to recover the weapon. When he had it he let go of her.

"How many poisons, Wu Tu? Five?" he asked her, but for the moment she had no breath to answer him. He pressed the point of the knife on the gilded wood behind the divan; the hollow bodkin-blade yielded a little against a spring within the golden handle. Through an almost invisible hole in the point of the blade there oozed a colorless fluid. He sniffed it; and as he did that, the hand of the Chinese girl in the corridor parted the doorway curtain. He could see her eyes behind the hand.

"Send her for help," he suggested. "She might bring Zamin Ali."

Without turning her head—fixedly watching his eyes—Wu Tu dismissed the girl with a gesture.

"Damn you, Blair, what do you want?"

"Truth," he said. "Tell it. Why are you afraid of Zaman Ali?"

"I?" She was chafing her right wrist. "You think I fear him—or you? You shall learn what fear is!"

Weird, wild music swelled and ceased, as if a door had been suddenly opened and swiftly closed. Her anger stole away behind new laughter in her dark eyes.

"Now you have a very deadly weapon," she said. "Kill me if you dare, while you can. What are you waiting for?"

"For Chetusingh," he answered. There was a carpet-deadened footfall in the corridor.

Blair rose to his feet. Wu Tu watched him, fascinated. His eyes, unafraid but alert, were aware of peril, but the dagger in his right hand seemed to bother him. It was not his type of weapon. Suddenly he raised it shoulder high and plunged its point into the lacquered table-top between the jade vase and the golden figurine. He struck so deep that the dagger-handle scarcely quivered. Then the jangling curtains parted. Zaman Ali strode in.

His were bold eyes, arrogant with triumph. But he looked wary. He was in no haste. Close behind him, as he stood thrusting out his stomach, with his hands in a broad Bokhariot belt, the Chinese girl's ivory hand made a signal and vanished. The Afghan's beard, new-dyed, lent red to the glare of angered cunning in his wind-wild eyes. But his lips smiled, showing strong teeth stained with *pan*.

His Bokhariot coat hung loosely and revealed a silk shirt that hinted at rubbery muscle beneath. His coned cap, turbaned in silk, sat jauntily. His curved, coarse nose, that spread until the curves went astray in the fierce mustache, twitched. He rubbed it—but that might have been to attract attention to the ruby in the ring on his middle finger.

"Mashallah! God's wonders never cease!" he said in Pushtu. "Ismail ben Alif Khan is—"

"Warrender of the police. What are you doing in Bombay, Zaman Ali?"

"Praised be God, I sold my horses. Please God, I shall now learn why I was watched—from the Pass to Peshawar—to Delhi—to Umballa—to Nuklao—to Ahmedabad—to Cawnpore—to Poona—to Bombay. A Pathan I knew you were not. Had I known you are Warrender—"

His fingers, stained and calloused, closed on an imaginary weapon.

"Peace! Not in my house!" Wu Tu warned in a sharp voice. She, too, spoke in Pushtu.

Blair answered in English. "Don't be a damned fool, Zaman Ali. The door's locked, and you've nine men. But did Chetusingh tell you the house is surrounded? You didn't expect that, did you?"

"What of it?" Zaman Ali shrugged his shoulders. Then he swaggered to the divan and sat beside Wu Tu, drawing his legs up under him. Almost imperceptibly she shrank away; and almost he contrived to look as if he owned the place. But there was something lacking. He was not quite at his ease.

"Where did you come from to Peshawar?" Blair demanded. "You didn't bring your string of horses down the Khaiber. They were a blind. You picked them up in Peshawar. I know who sold them to you."

The Afghan stared, not answering.

"What did you do in Rajputana?"

"Allah! Where I was not, what did I? That is a good conundrum!"

"When did you last see Brigadier-General Frensham?"

Insolently, Zaman Ali called to the Chinese girl in the corridor to fetch his water-pipe. Then: "I never heard of him," he answered.

"Do you think in the jail you might remember?"

"Allah!" Zaman Ali glanced at Wu Tu, but she avoided his eyes. She glanced at the door behind the screen. Blair strode to the door and kicked the panel. The door opened inward a few inches, struck something or someone and shut with a thud. A bolt clicked. "Where is Chetusingh?" he demanded.

"Dead," said Zaman Ali. "Where did you suppose he is?"

Wu Tu laughed at that. The wolf-yelp overtone was nearer than it had been. She lighted a cigarette and looked straight at Blair, then leaned back lazily, blowing smoke-ring: "Dead," she said. "Perhaps. But you prove it!"

"Prove it, yes," said Zaman Ali. "That will be a piece of work for the police!"

"You surround my house," said Wu Tu. "Don't you think I knew that?"

"There's a secret passage from your cellar to the yard behind Grish Lal's Godown. Did you know I knew it?" Blair retorted. "That's blocked."

Wu Tu looked slightly startled, but the look in her eyes changed to clouded cunning. She shrugged a bit further away from Zaman Ali.

"I'm going to look for Chetusingh," said Blair. He reached the doorway in three strides, turned facing them and backed through the curtain, colliding with the Chinese girl. He groped for her—he was watching for a move by Wu Tu or Zaman Ali. His hand closed on her neck and she offered no resistance. When he glanced at her she blew cigarette smoke in his face.

He shoved her along in front of him and tried the door of the next room, twenty feet along the passage. It appeared to be locked, but he could hear laughter and music. The Chinese girl suddenly thrust at his eyes with her lighted cigarette. He grabbed her wrist and then almost lost consciousness in a blaze of agony as something struck him on the back of the head from behind.

"The commissioner was right. It's a trap, and I'm in it," was his first thought. "Now what?"

THE pain was welcome; he knew he could not have felt it if he had been knocked out. He let his knees yield under him, and as he fell, amid the fire that flashed in his eyes he saw the Chinese girl's face smoking the cigarette in the jade tube, calmly indifferent. He closed his eyes again and lay still. He felt himself being searched by experienced hands; the police pass that he had shown to the patrol crackled as someone took it from its envelope. He heard Wu Tu's voice:

"You dog! If you killed him—"

Then Zaman Ali's, speaking Pushtu: "Wah, wah—dogs' names on a woman's tongue—death in her heart! Nay, tie him. Tie his hands behind him. Bring him back here."

Someone seized his arms. Some other man tied his wrists unmercifully tight. Then he was dragged by the feet, face downward. He contrived to raise his head an inch or two to save his face from being skinned, but the Chinese girl set her foot on it promptly, not pressing, however, as hard as she might have done. He took that for a hint and guessed she was obeying Wu Tu's order.

Once in the room, they turned him on his back and he glimpsed that the door behind the screen was opened wide. He could feel blood on his face and he suspected he looked a pretty bad casualty, so he kept his eyes shut and lay still. He could hear Wu Tu's voice arguing in whispers, but could not distinguish words, until at last she said in English angrily:

"You heard me say no! You have got what you wanted. Now go to the devil and I will take what I want!"

Water was dashed in his face, again and again, so he opened his eyes. The Chinese girl was dipping water in a cup from a crystal bowl. She seemed quite uninterested and kept on splashing until he sat up. Then he almost betrayed astonishment, because Chetusingh stood staring at him, smiling and apparently awaiting orders.

"Loose my hands!" he commanded. "Look sharp!"

"There!" said Wu Tu's voice. Someone else exclaimed "Allah!" Wu Tu again: "Does that satisfy you?"

Then he knew the man was not Chetusingh, but someone remarkably like him who was dressed in Chetusingh's clothes and had studied the Rajput's mannerisms.

"He will do in the dark," said Wu Tu.

She was on the divan beside Zaman Ali. Three men who might be Punjabis stood near them, but they were dressed in bazaar-made English suits, with brass watch-chains. They looked like deadly-respectable merchants on a night out.

Near them was an Afghan in silver-rimmed spectacles, who looked like a teacher of the Koran. And there was another man who might be anything—Sikh, Dogra, Mahratta—in a well cut blue serge suit, who had an undefinable look of being well educated; but he looked silly in striped socks. His must be the brown-and-white shoes under the mat downstairs. He had a blackjack in his hand and the sight of that made Blair realize that his head ached. He could feel a big bruise swelling where the blackjack had hit him.

"Why do you wait?" asked Wu Tu. It was a command. There was much more than a hint of a threat in her voice and the man who looked like Chetusingh made a gesture toward the curtained doorway, flourishing Chetusingh's police pass. All five men followed him through the curtain. Other men—Blair could not see how few or how many—joined them in the corridor. The Chinese girl went and let them out by the door at the stair-head, while Zaman Ali sat gloating over Blair's police pass.

"Mashallah!" he remarked. "It is signed by the commissioner! The great—the wise commissioner, whom none mistrusts but all obey! 'Pass bearer on government duty!' Wah! Wah!" He produced a fat wallet and discovered, after groping in its crowded pockets, a photograph of himself, about passport size. The Chinese girl brought paste; he pasted the photograph on to the pass. She brought Chinese ink; he impressed his thumb-print on the photograph. The killer grin hardened the rims of his eyes and the sides of his mouth. "May God reward thee!" he said, staring at Blair. "Soon!" he added. "If I give thee choice of knife or bullet—?"

Blair's voice sounded strangely far off to himself, because his head throbbed and it was very difficult to keep the room from seeming to whirl around him.

"Save yourself from the noose if you can, Zaman Ali!" he answered. "Why do you hesitate?"

Wu Tu spoke up, "It is to me you owe that you are not dead."

Zaman Ali stuck the pass into his wallet and rubbed the palms of his hands together. "Never a woman yet told more than half a truth," he said. "Ye hold each other's lives in trust. Let up on me! If not, she and you shall learn together—the feel of the finger of death!" He said that slowly.

Wu Tu, also speaking slowly, added, "Honorably—now—you have to save my life, too."

Blair glanced at the knife he had stuck in the table-top, and noticed that the golden figurine was missing. "Rot!" he answered. "What are you afraid of, Zaman Ali?"

The Afghan grinned. "If there is a truth

under heaven," he said, "it is this, it is this: that a fish stinks from the head first. Like officer, like rank and file. Now that I know who tracked me from Peshawar, shall I doubt who should die first, if the police make any trouble?"

"Tell where Frensham is. That's the only way to save trouble," Blair retorted. "That stolen pass may get you out of Bombay, but it won't save your neck in the long run."

THERE was a north-wind look in Zaman Ali's eyes; it was weirdly out of place in that hot, exotic room.

"Frensham?" he asked. "Who is he?"

The door at the stair-head thudded shut and the Chinese girl spoke through the curtain in Chinese to Wu Tu, who translated for Zaman Ali's benefit:

"They have escaped the police, who thought it was Chetusingh and obeyed him. The police went away."

"The police are—fools, and their mothers were wild she-swine," said Zaman Ali. "I will go before they come back, furious to regain whatever pride such pigs have."

He gave the Chinese girl some silver money, which she accepted without a murmur of thanks, although she glanced at the money. Then he stared at Wu Tu, and she nodded. Turning his back then, and without another glance at Blair, he swaggered through the jingling curtain. The Chinese girl let him out by the stair-head door. Wu Tu smiled.

"Do you understand, Blair?" she asked. "You are to forget this. Zaman Ali needed passes. Now he has them it is all right."

"Loose my wrists," he answered. With an effort that made his head surge with pain he struggled to his feet and waited for her. Wu Tu hesitated, listening. There was an opened window somewhere, perhaps on a higher floor. Muffled by intervening passages and curtains came the familiar riot-roar of Moslems pursuing Hindus.

"Ya Allah! Din! Din!"

It was like a squall of wind smiting the hot night—sudden—over in a moment—vanishing along a dark street in silence.

"Thus," said Wu Tu, "if the oh-so-sly police did not really go away, Zaman Ali had been swept out of their clutches. He will keep the pass for later on. Will you sit still if I loose you?"

"No. Where's Chetusingh? They'd have killed me if they'd killed him."

"Murder," she answered, "isn't done in my house. Chetusingh isn't here any longer." She began to unfasten his wrists, picking at the tight knots, swearing at them, until the Chinese girl brought a knife. Warrender held out his freed wrists for the girl to chafe. Her hands were strong, but so small that he laughed and turned to Wu Tu.

"You do it."

He sat beside her on the divan, setting his teeth because movement brought surges of pain to his head. Wu Tu chafed his wrists and ordered ice, which the Chinese girl brought in the crystal bowl and applied skilfully. Then, at a glance from Wu Tu, the Chinese girl carried out the lacquered table, in which the poisoned dagger was sticking upright, and brought in a silvered brazier from which there oozed an erotic symphony of blended perfume—soundless music that lazed on the air, half-visible as green gray smoke. She washed the blood then from Warrender's forehead.

"Better now?" Wu Tu asked him.

He reached over her lap, took the knife that she had laid beside her on the divan and, without glancing at it, sent it spinning through the open door beyond the screen.

"Much better," he answered.

"Then listen—"

He interrupted. "Tell me what you know of Frensham."

She looked straight in his eyes. "Blair—better make friends with me, hadn't you? You're a fool if you don't. You can't make trouble for me. All you have had from me is first aid, after coming here disguised and getting into a brawl. Line up all my little widows if you like and see what *they* say! Two or three of them might even lodge a claim against you, for hitting them when you were drunk. Could you deny it? What would you say to the magistrate?"

Blair recalled instructions: "Walk straight into the trap and use your wits!" His wits suggested that it might be wise to walk in looking not too confident. He sat silent, letting his face express a medley of emotions. Wu Tu talked on:

"People don't love the police. And I have influence. If you were publicly charged with a drunken assault in my house, could you keep it quiet? Half a million Indians would seize that opportunity to make a scandal and to be more bitter than ever against the British. Your commissioner would let you be a scapegoat. And then what?"

"What do you suggest?" he asked after a moment.

"Let us be friends, you and I. I will make you famous!"

It went against the grain to nibble that bait, but he did it. "Will you tell me about Frensham?"

"Yes! You think that perhaps I know. Perhaps I do know. Little widows learn big se-

crets—sometimes. That is why I have them."

"Where's Chetusingh?" he asked suddenly.

"Hah! You saw him leave my house with a police pass! How should I know where he went? And what if Chetusingh is my man? Eh? What of it? Didn't he turn Christian? Can't he turn a coat again? I could afford to buy a thousand of him!"

"Well—what of Frensham?"

"If I show you how to find him—if I give you that pig Zaman Ali to hang, and all his riffraff with him—are we friends, you and I?"

She lay back on the cushions, inbreathing the perfumed smoke. Her eyes were excited. Her limbs, that were really tensely still, stole movement from the fan-blown silk of her clothing. Even the whirring of the electric fan contributed something to the sensuous effect; and through the open door behind the screen came slow strains of half-smothered music. The trap was plain enough. And Blair's head ached. Wu Tu knew that, so he closed his eyes—lay back lazily, dreading a prick from a poisoned dagger—drugs—perhaps chloroform—glad that his head ached, since it helped him cling to consciousness.

THE Chinese girl approached in silence, watched him for interminable seconds, and then laid cunningly sensitive hands on his temples and over his eyes. If that was meant to hypnotize him, she was out of luck. It had the opposite effect; it stirred alertness; it was even rather difficult to sham sleep. Wu Tu leaned over him, perfumed, adding some kind of movement that did have a calming effect, but the Chinese girl's hands were an irritant. Between their united efforts he was as fully awake as he ever had been in his life.

"Blair!" Wu Tu leaned over him, breath to breath. In a tiger's fangs a man might feel the same sensation of numbed dreaminess; but the Chinese girl's fingers kept stroking his eyes, and he wondered whether she knew she was keeping time to the pulse of his headache. She was undoing all the effect of Wu Tu's efforts. He lay still, breathing steadily, until at last she pinched the lobe of his ear—he supposed, to find out whether he was conscious. Getting no response, she pressed the bruise on the back of his head. He was not sure whether he winced at that or not; however, he thought not, because she stood by after that and did nothing, while Wu Tu spoke:

"Blair! You are asleep—asleep—asleep. You hear me speaking—Wu Tu speaking, whom you know as Marie. You obey Marie because you trust her, and because she knows how to promote you to money and high position. You know the police are fools. You know the police will waste time following some unimportant people who are using Chetusingh's and your passes. But you will say nothing about that. You will let them do it, while you do real work. You know how to find where David Frensham is. You will go to Henrietta—straight from here to Henrietta. You love Henrietta and she loves you. You will make her tell you what she knows.

"Blair, you are a man! You impose your will. You will have your own way with your woman. You are strong. You love with the strength of a savage. She shall tell you her secrets. Henrietta shall tell you her secrets—all her secrets. You will make her tell them. Henrietta is your woman."

Nothing could be better calculated to make him shy of Henrietta. Blair's instincts were savagely decent. If he loathed one insolence more than another, it was to be told how to govern his private thoughts. Left to himself, he might have fallen utterly in love with Henrietta; he knew that. But her father had tactlessly tried to encourage him; he had almost never even to himself confessed that reason for shying off, but it was true, and he knew it was true.

As a police officer he was perfectly willing to die blindly obeying official orders; as a private individual he would much rather die than have his private judgment interfered with, uninvited. That Henrietta's father and even Henrietta herself should have talked it over with the commissioner was their privilege, no doubt. Blair had his privilege too; he could go his own way.

But what the devil did all this mean? How had Henrietta become involved with Wu Tu? They had held some conversations, said the commissioner, to his certain knowledge; but one thing, at least, was unthinkable; he was no such cad as to imagine that Henrietta even guessed what Wu Tu was trying to do to him. To be told whom he should love, by a notorious quarter-caste, and to be instructed by her how to behave toward the object of his directed emotions, was only less abominable than Wu Tu's gall in daring even to mention Henrietta's name. He was enraged to the depths of his savage obstinacy. But he lay still.

Wu Tu spoke to the Chinese girl. He cursed himself for not knowing more than ten words of the Chinese language. He heard the bead-curtain jingle as the girl left the room.

"Sleep—sleep—you are asleep!" said Wu Tu.

SHORTLY after that he heard a man's footsteps in the corridor, barefooted, rutching along the carpet with irregular steps—thump-shuffle-thump-thump-shuffle-thump-thump. He

knew that signal—listened. It was repeated. It was in his and Chetusingh's code, known to nobody else and devised for emergencies. Twice repeated, it could hardly be coincidence. It meant:

"Carry on independently of me for the time being."

The stair-head door opened and shut, and the Chinese girl returned into the room. She resumed manipulations with her hands on Blair's temples and presently—he supposed, to find out whether he was conscious—pressed the bruise on his head. He winced perceptibly, but she appeared not to notice it. Wu Tu spoke with her lips so close to Blair's face that he breathed her perfumed breath.

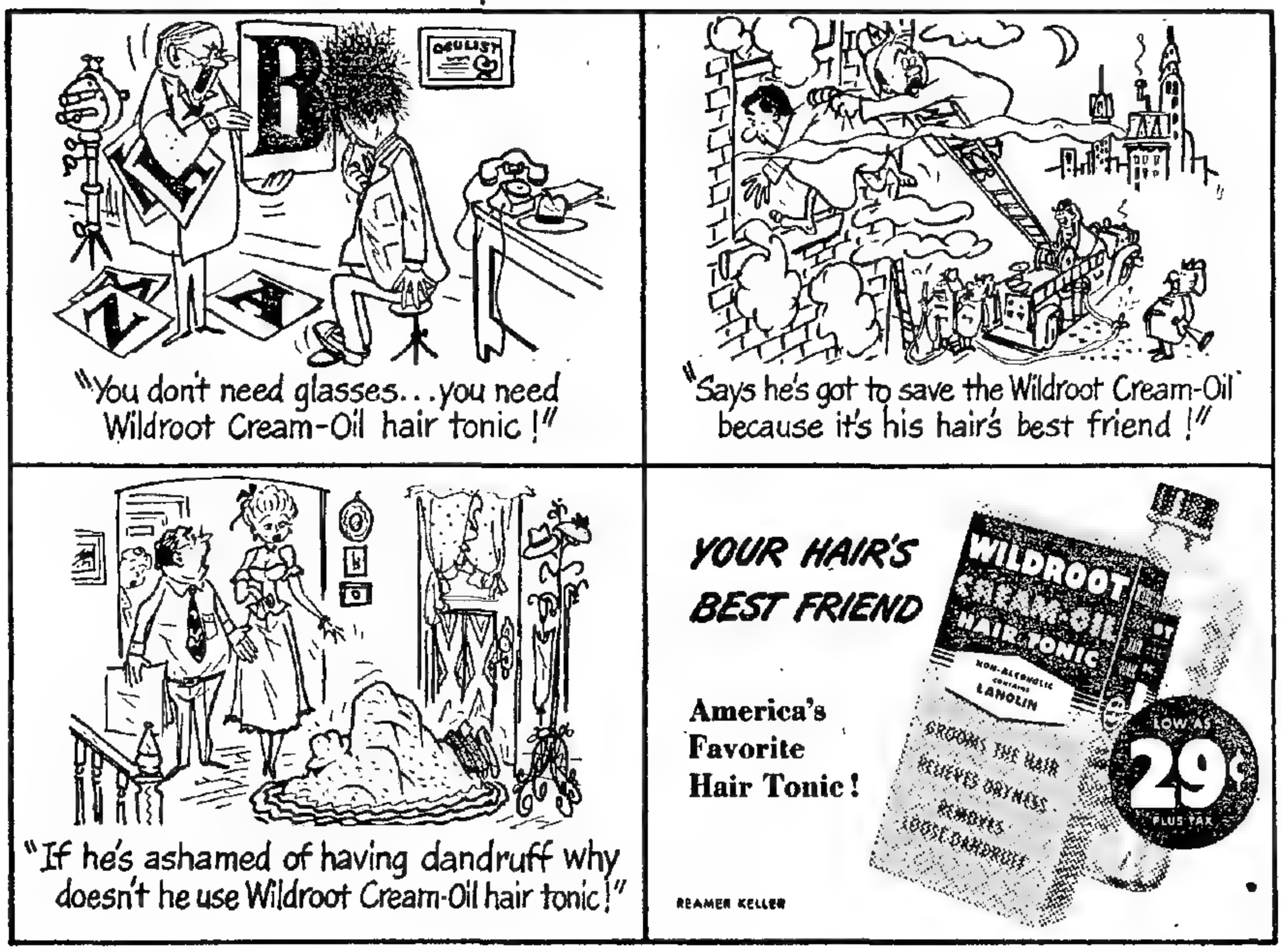
"Blair! You will go straight from here to the commissioner. You will say to the commissioner that Zaman Ali and his gang are escaping from Bombay with stolen passes and will probably scatter. Let the police pursue them. You will say that Wu Tu told you she is going to Lahore, with all her companions. You will tell him you yourself should go at once to Henrietta Frensham, in order to question her, because Wu Tu says that Henrietta knows what happened to her father.

"You will say that Wu Tu gave you good advice and is assisting the police. You will insist on seeing Henrietta. Should the commissioner refuse, you will be mutinous. You will put in for leave. If the leave is refused, you will go, nevertheless; you will depend on Wu Tu to protect you with secret influence.

"You must see Henrietta—you must see her. You will see her. Nothing shall prevent it. She loves you and you love her. You will make her tell her secret. And to help you—to remind you—Wu Tu's eyes shall watch you—always—always. You shall see Wu Tu's eyes by day and night. They protect. They remind."

The Chinese girl touched his hand with the end of a lighted cigarette. It was only the least touch. He endured it. Then some scented females came and peeped at him. They giggled and made silly jokes. Wu Tu sent them all out of the room, but followed, and he heard her talking to them in the corridor in Hindustanee. He could not hear what was said, but he had no doubt she was instructing them what to say if questioned. He began to wonder when to wake up.

Presently the stair-head door shook to the thump of policemen's cudgels. Wu Tu hurried in and shook him, slapping the backs of his hands and commanding him to wake. He let her grow half-hysterical before he opened his eyes, sat up and stared. She faced about toward the curtained doorway, and there stood Govind Singh, a veteran from police head-


"You don't need glasses...you need Wildroot Cream-Oil hair tonic!"
"Says he's got to save the Wildroot Cream-Oil because it's his hair's best friend!"
"If he's ashamed of having dandruff why doesn't he use Wildroot Cream-Oil hair tonic!"
YOUR HAIR'S BEST FRIEND
America's Favorite Hair Tonic!
WILDROOT CREAM-OIL HAIR TONIC
NON-ALCOHOLIC CONTAINS LANOLIN
GROOMS THE HAIR
RELIEVES DRYNESS
REMOVES LOOSE DANDRUFF
LOW AS 29¢ PLUS TAX
REAMER KELLER

quarters, with two constables at his back.

"*Hokee mut*—drunk!" said Wu Tu and shrugged her shoulders. "You should teach your officers not to be quarrelsome when they are drunk. This one came to not much harm, but he was fortunate."

Govind Singh, bearded, erect, official, with a row of medal-ribbons, strode into the room and picked Blair's turban off the floor. He put it on him, a bit clumsily, neither man saying a word; as Govind Singh helped him to his feet his eyes did not reveal that Blair's hand, clutching his arm, was making dot-dash signals. Looking sternly disapproving, and lending Blair the use of his left arm, the veteran started for the door; but his right hand clutched the paper money that Wu Tu let fall for the Chinese girl to pick up and give him as he shouldered his way through the curtain.

Blair said nothing to Wu Tu, but smiled as he passed her. He seemed puzzled, as if searching memory. Her answering smile, as she put her fingers over her eyes and peered at him between them, was assured—contented—knowing.

Outside, in the dark street, out of earshot of the darker shadows, as Blair marched beside Govind Singh at the head of six policemen two by two, the Sikh spoke:

"Should I have come, sahib?"

"I expected you sooner."

"Idiots returned saying Chetusingh came forth from Wu Tu's house with many men and ordered them back to the *khana*. They said he showed them his pass. What does that mean?"

"Report it to the commissioner."

"And Wu Tu? What of Wu Tu, sahib?"

"How much did she give you? I wasn't looking."

They tramped all the rest of the way to police headquarters in silence.

Chapter Four

Under sun or stars there is no saying, of fool or wiseman, that is nearer the truth than that now is the appointed time. But it may be the time for waiting. And it may be the time for patience. When I said to my Teacher: Tell me what to do now, I will do it, He went fishing.

—From the Seventh of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

DAY dawned mystically as it always does in Indian hot weather. It is said that children born at daybreak bring with them into the world a mysticism and a great sense of beauty that they never lose.

The driver was a Sikh who never heard of nerves, so the commissioner's car wove like a shuttle amid creaking bullock-carts and sleepy pedestrians.

"Are you quite sure your head is all right?" the commissioner asked. It was the second time he had asked that since they sped over the bridge that connects Bombay with the mainland.

"Aches a bit. It'll be all right in the train."

Blair Warrender sat relaxed and leaned his head back. Telling the commissioner—being cross-examined by him—had been hard work. He retorted with a question: "Did they describe the man who used my pass?"

"Vaguely. He was seen by lamplight. The guard at the bridge-head took it for granted he was you. The pass said Ismail ben Alif Khan. There was a thumb-print on the attached photograph and everything appeared to be in order. He said the photo resembled the bearer. That, of course, is questionable. He probably didn't look carefully. As a matter of routine he phoned headquarters after the man was gone. Headquarters got me out of bed at once. Zaman Ali was not at the *dera*."

"Was the man alone?"

"Yes."

"Chetusingh's pass was used by nine men?"

"In a stolen Ford truck, at three forty five a.m. There's nothing against the owner of the truck. The men are at large; they'll turn up somewhere, using the passes, and get arrested. The point is, Zaman Ali double-crossed himself. He is using the stolen passes to draw a red herring behind his own trail. He thinks he's thrown us off the scent. He hasn't."

Blair scowled, keen on his job and yet dreading it. "I'm in the dark," he said. "I can't guess why I wasn't murdered last night—once by Wu Tu, once by Zaman Ali. They both had a chance. I obeyed orders and behaved like an imbecile—walked straight into an obvious trap, and took all chances."

"I only know one other officer who could do that," said the commissioner in one of his bursts of generosity. "Most men would have been clever at the wrong time."

Blair had an almost superstitious dread of being praised before a job was finished, so he talked for the sake of talking, using words as an umbrella against bad luck:

"Wu Tu did her best to scare me—I mean inside-psychic-scare me—with a poisoned dagger. But it wasn't poisoned. The stuff looked to me like alcohol. I suppose she was no such fool as to take a chance with poison, knowing I might get a scratch with the thing. I laid odds she didn't want me murdered—not in her

house. *They* wanted police passes. *She* wanted me knocked out. They won both bets. I suppose it's reckoned easier to hypnotize a man when he's out from a blow on the head. If I had questioned her about that golden figurine—"

"Why didn't you?"

"It was too obviously set to attract my attention, so I shied off, hoping she would make a break about it. But it's difficult to make a woman lead trumps. I believe the thing was gold. If you know what I mean by pre-Egyptian, I should say it was all that. I never saw anything like it in any museum. It was exactly the same color as that box or whatever it is you showed me. It looked as if it had been smoothed by a million hands for a million years. Its face was—damned if I can tell you. Elemental is the only word I can think of. I've seen something rather like it in dreams. Pretty hairraising. Nothing decent about it—except the skill; it was marvelous molding. It wasn't Indian, I'll swear that."

"She said nothing at all about it?"

"No. Sent it out of the room with the dagger, perhaps to increase my curiosity; she must have known I'd notice it. When I get in the train I'll try to draw a picture of the thing from memory and post it back to you."

"Yes, do that. Are you absolutely sure Chetusingh walked out alone?"

"No. I heard him pass along the corridor. He made a signal. It's a special one he and I invented. Wu Tu bragged about having corrupted him. She may have done it. Govind Singh took money from her."

"You saw that?"

"Two one-hundred rupee notes. And Govind Singh's one of our old reliables."

The commissioner grinned. "Yes, I think I can depend on Govind Singh. Wu Tu doesn't tip for nothing, even in a tight place. But police secrets are like stable-secrets; you can't check 'em. Govind Singh will tell her the police are hot-foot after Zaman Ali and his friends—and that you've been hurried off to Rajputana. Give 'em what they want. I always do it. Your taking a train six stations up the line will make 'em think we're trying to keep your movements secret. Obvious secrecy is the best decoy in the world. You're a decoy. Remember it."

THE car's long shadow flitted monstrously through suburbs, where the dust lay thick on sunlit mango trees and the smoke of a million dung-cakes sharpened the scent of the stirring countryside. There was nearly a crash. The Sikh drove roaring between two bullock-carts. A rising camel missed Nirvana by the width of a ray of sunshine on his mangy hide. But all that vanished in a cloud of dust and neither the Sikh nor his passengers batted an eyelid. They sat in silence. It was the Sikh's job anyhow.

"A crime that includes David Frensham and his daughter isn't ordinary," the commissioner said at last. "Zaman Ali sold his string of horses at a loss—let 'em go for a song. That means something else pays him better than horses. Treasure? Remember, he has been dealing in bullion and spending money remarkably freely for him. So has Wu Tu dealt in bullion. Taron Ling has bolted as I hoped."

"Lost him?" Blair asked.

"For the moment. We'll catch him. . . . And so Wu Tu wants you to make love to Henrietta? Always give 'em what they want, Blair!"

"Damn her eyes. How does she know about me and Henrietta? Who told?"

"It was pretty well bruited around, six months ago, that you and Henrietta were as good as engaged. Wu Tu gets all the gossip."

Blair scowled. "It was my fault. I wish I'd pulled out sooner. Truth is, Henrietta acted damned well and it never dawned on me, until too late, that she was getting romantic. I treated her damned badly."

The commissioner tried to smoke, but the wind spoiled the cigar so he threw it away. "Did I tell you she's my godchild?"

"Yes, you mentioned it." Blair spotted the sideways glance from under the gray eyebrows. He neither avoided nor met it. "Is that like vaccination? I mean—" Then he suddenly met the commissioner's eyes as straight and hard as point engages point in duel. "What does that protect her from?"

"Nothing. But it makes me sentimental. I suspect her. You're to make love if you have to. I hate it."

"I won't do it," Blair answered. "I'd a lot rather go to hell."

"That's why you're going. It's your privilege perhaps to save her from a bad mess. I suspect we're on the track of something more than ordinarily deadly, as well as mysterious, so don't go off half-cocked. Information, yes; proof, yes; fireworks, no! Take your time and get your evidence. I'll watch Wu Tu. If she doesn't bolt, I'll do something to scare her out. Nothing like getting 'em moving."

They approached a wayside station. A short, special freight train, that had happened to be going north from that station with government stores, had been caught by telephone. It waited in the station siding with an old-fashioned passenger coach attached. Porters pounced on Blair's bedding, steel trunk, rifle-case and two or three small packages. The commissioner smiled:

"Bear in mind that David Frensham, just before he disappeared, was curiously interested in the difference between sun and moonlight. It was one of his crazes."

Blair shrugged his shoulders.

"And remember that the East has always dreaded moonlight. It's supposed not only to madden lovers. David Frensham seriously believed it has mysterious qualities that sunshine hasn't."

"Damn all moonshine!" Blair climbed into the train and they shook hands through the window.

"If my suspicions are right," said the commissioner, "File FF should get some interesting additions."

"To hell with FF!"

"Quite right. It's a bloody nuisance. It disturbs a fellow's trust in Hoyle and Culbertson. So keep your hair on. Walk into anything whatever that looks like a trap, and trust me to keep you in sight. We'll be close behind you. Good-by. Good luck!"

The engine seethed and clamored. An impatient Eurasian station-master with his watch in his hand kicked at a sleeping cur and made it yelp to call attention to himself; the commissioner nodded to him and he blew his whistle.

The train started.

There was no ice—no comfort. The engine grumbled along a track that resembled an aching steel nerve, toward a heat-haze bounded only by infinity. The commissioner's car sped away in a dust cloud of its own, toward the smoke-stacks which fringe the hot crucible of human emotions known on the maps as Bombay City.

When Blair Warrender stepped from the train at Abu Road, it was into the dazzling glare of Rajasthan. He loved it. It was a land after his own heart—a land of anger and good manners. Conquered times out of number, its conquered, like the English Saxons, always forced new masters and new chivalry to bloom and live by glory or be damned.

Warrender's great-grandfather had fought under Arthur Wellesley. He was the grandson of a gunner officer who died on the Ridge in '57. His uncle had led a squadron of Indian cavalry to Kabul and was mentioned in despatches by "Bobs" of Kandahar. So he was unlikely to lack what he needed in *that* land, where even a peasant usually traces his descent from warriors who looted and fought ere history was written.

A rajah, whose royal lineage was already ancient when the gods (so says the legend) walked on earth with men, provided too many ponies and too much camp equipment. A zemindar lent servants to whom such service is traditional privilege, a trifle arrogantly seized and quarrelsomely held, but rendered feudally and with alertness to observe all reasons why such duties are a source of pride.

The encampments, night after night for five nights, were a rendezvous for veterans who had served before Blair Warrender saw daylight, under men whose graves had strewn the long length of the North West Frontier. There were tales and songs by fire—and moonlight, and the days were a procession of wayside courtesies. Until one evening Blair pitched near Doongar, where the jungle heaves at the foot of Gaglajung, amid hills like the humps of camels.

Abdurrahman Khan—Moslem Zemindar of Hindu acres, and as part and parcel of them as ever a Norman landlord was on Saxon soil—sat gray and dignified on a camp-stool under the awning of Blair's big tent. He reached out a hand such as El Greco painted, for the rifle that Blair's borrowed gun-bearer was cleaning. His own sabre, brought in honor of the occasion, lay bright and legendary-looking on the knees of a grandson squatting near him. He examined the rifle and then handed it back.

"In my day," he remarked, "I have seen much that was new, which seemed good. But by Allah (blessings on His Prophet!) it was forth from a man that goodness came. And not always was it goodness! As a man's heart are his weapons."

Blair merely nodded, watching the Indian night, dark, swift, splendid, deepen on jungle and hills. Such information as he sought lurks, shy of argument. It creeps forth like the jungle dwellers in the stillness. Royal Rajasthan drew on her starlit cloak, which is a conjurer of moods. He awaited a mood of indiscretion. In front, a mile away, the ruined keep of Gaglajung—shadowy fangs on a dark crag—told of the days when men of action struck such blows on time that the reverberations still make songs on the lips of minstrels. Such history lives in the night. It could be felt, like the smells in the dew that the animals observe and understand.

"By God, we need more *chota sahibs*," the old Rangar grumbled. He had talked mere politics for an hour. "There were never enough of those young brass-gutted Britons. They rode hard and died laughing at mysteries. They understood not much except how to be men, but that was plenty. They served for us to form on and to follow, and by God, we did it. But to-day whom shall the men with stout hearts follow? Babus? Nowadays the sahibs have to wait on babu's orders. As for the police—"

It was coming. Blair did not betray that he

was waiting for it. He watched the rise of the moon, almost full, beyond Gaglajung. It suffused night with amber mystery—that secret stuff of which songs are woven, and music, and tales of gods and men. The passionate beauty and silence of the scene would have been almost unendurable but for the old Rangar's croaking.

"I am old. My day is done. But I know man from woman. He, camped yonder, is a woman. He is too much wifed. He looks up regulations in a book. He hesitates, instead of knowing what he knows and, by God, leaving what he does not know to give God exercise. He has another woman with him who could make two men of one husband. But he is married to a wife who makes two women of him."

Blair said nothing. For a minute or two the old Rangar meditated, until out of the distant silences there came a cough, half roar, half grunt. The obscene voice of Kol-Bhalu, the jackal who follows tigers, answered. Then, for a sudden moment, even the insects were still, and Blair glanced at his rifle.

"Time enough yet," said the Rangar. "Grayne sahib won't leave a book to spoil our sport. To-night is our night. Such as he is, put off danger until to-morrow, and then give the order to build a machan in a safe place such as books recommend. Wah! A father of tigers, this one. Some name him, saying also that Kol Bhalu, who dogs him, is the spirit of a money-lender whom he slew last year—aye, and devoured. Since then he has slain seven men. He has grown cunning; he is not to be taken in traps. But the watchers are out. The stops are well placed. He will slake his thirst at one of three pools, and then he will find all roads closed against him, except this one, by the charcoal-burners' ghat, toward us. He will come near midnight. . . . I was speaking of women."

"Speak on."

"Frennisham, her name is—daughter to the Brigadier Bahadur who they say is missing. What she does here is a mystery, save that she visits the Graynes; and them she uses as it suits her. She is without fear and she runs uncommon risks—wanders these hills all alone, on a pony or on foot as the spirit moves her —and by night, too. Hers is a restless spirit. She should be the mother of good fighting men. She knows the ancient songs of Rajasthan -aye, and the dances—teaches them to the children, who were better without such superstitious stuff. She has slept more than once in a villager's hut—forever questioning—forever seeking something, none unless it be the Bat-Brahmin, knows what. They tell strange tales about him and her."

Blair met the old Rangar's gaze for a moment. "It is a land of strange tales," he answered. Then he stared again at the ruined keep of Gaglajung, now reddish amid soot-dark shadows. Where the moon shone through gaps of broken masonry imagination refused to believe there was not living flame. He spoke unexpectedly:

"Tell me the story of that place." Old tales beget true confidences. Questions about Henrietta Frensham would have stanched the flow of truth by suggesting curiosity, which makes the eastern mind evasive.

THE Rangar, well pleased, cleared his throat. His grandson, with the sword across his knees, hitherto as motionless as a moonlit carving, leaned forward to listen. His eyes obeyed the gesture of the old man's right hand pointing toward Gaglajung.

"Your honor knows the ballad about Ranjeet of the Ford? Yonder the ford lies—this side of Doongar Village, between us and Grayne sahib's camp. That castle commanded the ford in the old days. It was Ranjeet Singh's. None could burn him out of it, and he was known as Ranjeet of the Ford—a wonder of a man, who swore to have his will of life up yonder and not die at all but leave earth in a way more pleasing. It befell otherwise. She who died last in that place, is—men say so—there yet. Some say they have seen her."

"Have *you* seen her?" Blair asked.

The old man stared, but Blair was looking at the night. Only the grandson betrayed excitement; he leaned farther forward. The Rangar continued:

"I have seen and heard strange things in my day. God's truth is what matters. She of whom I speak was known by a name that means Queen of the Moon. It was not hers in the beginning. All astrologers are liars, saith the Prophet. I believe in none of their abominations. Nevertheless, they say that certain stars, when seen together near the moon, mean love and war in wondrous combinations, and an ill end.

"Ranjeet Singh desired her. His will was law. He stole her from her father's hold by Abu, after three years' fighting. It is said that as he bore her home he saw two stars beside the moon reflected in the ford, when he paused to water his horse. She, his prisoner, still hating him, he gazed into her eyes and renamed her Queen of the Moon. From that hour they two loved each other.

"Great was her love for him. The minstrels sing of it. They say she learned secrets that only the Brahmins know. And some say she did what Ranjeet of the Ford did not—escaped death. But such is the talk of idola-

ters, and may the curses of the Prophet rest on such abomination. So much Ranjeet loved her that he rode unwillingly when his plighted words compelled him to take up arms again. He was summoned afar off, to the aid of a prince who had once befriended him. In such natters no Rajput is his own master. He obeys his oath, no matter to whom he pledged it. Ranjeet rode forth, vowing not to come back save with honor.

"Her honor and his were one. She swore—for in those days they were *women*—she would hold that crag of his until he should return victorious, or unto death and forever. She and her women, and boys and old men were the garrison when Ranjeet led all his warriors away to aid a friend in need. More than one king slept ill at ease then, thinking how she might be had for the taking. By Allah, she was worth a campaign if there is truth in a tenth of the tales of her! Queen of the Moon men called her, and they said she knew great secrets. Three kings laid siege to that fortress yonder. They agreed between them that the first to storm the battlements should have *her,* and her secrets also, but the other plunder should be equally divided.

"They plucked the uncaught eagle. She and her women held that height so stubbornly that on this countryside to-day we say of a vainglorious boaster 'he taketh Gaglajung.' In armor, she led all sorties. She and her women held the breaches in the walls, while boys and old men toiled at the repairs. They said she knew the secrets of the Moon and that the Moon-god and the gods of day and night were all her servants. But there came a herald from the three kings, saying Ranjeet Singh, defeated, on his way home, had been taken prisoner. He was the prisoner of the three kings.

"In a letter to her, he bade her yield, as the price of his freedom. The three kings were casting lots for her when the herald brought back her answer, saying she believed no word of it, well knowing that Ranjeet Singh, her lord, was a man to whom honor and life were one, whereas the writer of that letter was without honor, like unto themselves. But Ranjeet was unworthy of her.

"The three kings set Ranjeet Singh arrayed in armor on a horse, and showed him to her. Then again they sent the herald. He returned again answering, "Nay, it is not he, because where is his honor?"

"Then, it is said, they tortured Ranjeet Singh, and he betrayed a hidden passage. That night they assaulted—all three kings with all their strength, from three sides and by the secret passage also. By Allah, they had light to see by! She burned the place. She and her women died in that furnace. But some say—may the lie blister their throats!—that she died not at all. It was full moon."

"*What had that to do with it?*"

"I know not. But they say that at full moon she walks the battlements and waits there yet for Ranjeet Singh to come with honor. Some say they have seen her spirit. As for me, I am a Sufi, and I think a man may inquire about life and death. But not too idly—nay, nor listen to such tales as that.

"The three kings slew Ranjeet Singh. Despising him, they put him in a tiger's cage. When he was devoured they let the tiger go, declaring the brute had done well. Thus sprang the legend that Ranjeet Singh incarnates in a tiger. A foolish legend, but men believe it. Look, sahib—nay, yonder, to the left a little."

Far off, probably a mile away, or more, a little yellow light moved slowly up and down, then vanished.

"He is coming," said the Rangar. "Ranjeet Singh, the superstitious call him. And they say, Slay him ever so often, ever he is reborn. They say he must prowl in that shape until she shall descend from Gaglajung and forgive him. Who knows? I am against all superstition. But I have heard wilder tales than that."

BLAIR got up and examined the breach of his rifle. The Rangar was old and the boy young, so that neither had part in the hunt. Blair followed a lean, loose-limbed shikarri, along the dry bed of a watercourse for upward of a mile, until they reached a bend where moonlight formed an amber pool at the foot of a huge rock. The shadow of the rock struck forward into that pool of light. Beyond, the dry watercourse entered a dark gorge with jungle-clad walls. To the right, beyond the rock, a smaller, stone-strewn watercourse descended from Gaglajung in shadowy zigzags, reaching the dry pool amid boulders beside a gnarled tree.

The shikarri whispered, "When he has killed, sahib, he goes by that way, up the flank of Gaglajung, where he dens in a cavern. But to-night he has not killed. He is angry."

So was Blair angry. What the devil was Henrietta doing, wandering about that countryside? He took his stand with his back to the rock, in soot-black shadow, motionless. The shikarri crouched near him behind a boulder. There were sounds not far off. Twigs snapped. A jackal yelled homeless anguish. Silence returned, heavy and as solid as the darkness of the breathless jungle. For twenty minutes night, time, silence and suspense all brooded peril, forefelt, until human nature yielded to the strain and time dimmed imagination. A

heavy, sullen sounding footfall came at last like a sound in a dream. The shikarri whispered:

"Bagh hai!"

Gray in the dimness, as sudden as if evolved out of eternity that moment, a tiger stood ghostly and vague in the throat of the gorge—motionless. The moonlight shone pale on his eyes. His head was flat with back-laid ears. He heard a sound behind him, wheeled and vanished. Two minutes passed—two eternities. Then he stood there again, in the same spot, couching his weight between his shoulders. Murderous eyes that saw Blair Warrender could not interpret what they saw. They awaited motion; he made none; he and his rifle were one still shadow, within a darkness. On the flank of the gorge in the dark a twig snapped sharply. The tiger vanished like a shadow, nowither. He was simply not there.

Three minutes, by Blair Warrender's pulse-beat. Then, out of the stillness behind the boulder on his right hand, the shikarri's tongue clucked on his cheek. That sound might mean anything, but certainly not nothing, from that shikarri. Warrender spared him a glance, but his eyes made only half the circuit; they were arrested midway by a shadow moving on the bed of the smaller watercourse. There was no sound.

Suddenly the tiger muttered—coughed—roared—three sounds, from three directions. He had made a circuit of the moonlight and lay crouching somewhere to the left, opposite the smaller watercourse. He could not be twenty paces away. His eyes became visible, nothing else. He appeared to be watching that new shadow that had set the shikarri's warning tongue in motion. There was sixty seconds' silence. Then he crept out into moonlight, tense, with his weight low, crouching for the rush that bears home spastic death on fang and claw.

Blair Warrender and his rifle became one entity. Flash, crack, echo were inseparable from the roaring snarl of anger as the tiger fell biting the wound that stung him, rolled into the shadow of a rock, recovered and then rushed at the throat of the smaller watercourse. A shot followed—hit him—hit hard. He roared and turned to face the enemy. A third shot rolled him over and he lay still, except that his claws tore the sand, anger surviving death by fifty spasms.

The shikarri began tossing pebbles, keeping the advantage of the boulder. There were sounds all around in the dark, but no one showed himself, not even when Blair reloaded and stepped out into the moonlight. A retreating jackal whimpered the tiger's requiem, obscene and ribald.

"Three shots?" said a woman's voice. The shadow lengthened in the throat of the smaller watercourse. There was a sound of footsteps, rubbered, on smooth rock. "Is it Ranjeet Singh or just an ordinary tiger?"

"Stay where you are!" Blair answered. He had seen too many dead tigers come to life to take unnecessary risks. He hurled a big stone at the carcass, then went close and prodded with the end of his rifle-barrel. "Yes," he said, "three shots. Is it Henrietta?"

She sprang to a small boulder and stood in full moonlight with her hands behind her, wearing no hat. Wavy, blond hair that looked like spun gold hid her face in shadow. There was an edge, like an aura, of moonlight that revealed her figure outlined under a smock of some flimsy material.

"Is it Ranjeet Singh?" she repeated.

Anger hardened Blair's voice. "What are you doing here at midnight?"

She leaped to the ground and walked toward him, with her back to the moon, until her shadow fell on the tiger. Her face was still almost invisible. She was tall, and she stood with the natural grace of a well-bred Rajput woman of the hills. She might be one —almost.

"Is he quite dead? Well, he deserved it. Poor old Ranjeet Singh! You know the legend?"

She knelt.

With strong weather-brown fingers she tried to close the tiger's staring eyes.

"He's a man-eater," said Blair. "He might have got *you*. Tigers—snakes—leopards—don't you know better than—" She stood up. He could see her face now—good humored—half-mocking. It made him hesitate. Pain—or it might be anger—underlay the humor. "Any better," he repeated, "than to take such chances?"

"Why should *you* care?" she answered. He could almost see the color of her eyes. "Blair, do you know what chance is?"

"What do you mean, Henrietta?" he said stiffly

"I shouldn't ask. I know the answer." She set her foot on the tiger's head. "If *you* knew, you wouldn't be on Wu Tu's list of—"

"Of what?"

"Wu Tu's sucker-list!"

She turned from him, knelt and with her fingers bared the tiger's fangs.

"Poor old Ranjeet Singh," she said. "You were another bold and clever one who lost out, weren't you?"

Then the Rangar came, leaning on his grandson's shoulder, and in a moment the pool of moonlight swarmed with men who emerged like ghosts from nowhere.

Chapter Five

Knowledge? Ye know nothing, save ye do it without thinking. Thought is the swamp of ignorance surrounding Knowledge. All must cross that. Build no stronghold on it, that will sink and become a hopeless dungeon, difficult to leave.

—From the Ninth unfinished Book of Noor Ali.

SOMEONE who looked like a Bat-Brahmin, ragged, arrogating privilege but insolently careless of its obligations, spat pan-juice from a shadow and spoke oracularly. The old Rangar gave orders, appearing to ignore the Bat's existence, but his feudal dignity masked experienced respect for something older than feudalism, deeper than logic. He approached Blair:

"If your honor permits, it is wise to observe a superstition if it does no harm. Trust me to see no whiskers are stolen. She"—he glanced at Henrietta Frensham—"need not watch, but she should stay near. Let them say the ghost of Ranjeet Singh is at rest."

Blair nodded. He watched the lean shikarri pull an oiled rag through the rifle-barrel. Then he strode over to Henrietta Frensham and sat beside her on a rock in the moonlight.

"Will you wait while they skin him?" he asked. "I'll send for ponies afterward and see you back to camp."

"Why? Is that necessary?"

"I intend to tell Grayne while I'm hot about it what I think of his letting you roam these hills at night."

"Is it your business? What are *you* doing here?" she retorted.

Blair looked straight in front of him. The men around the tiger's carcass, twenty feet away, resembled ghouls at a graveyard feast of flesh. He hardly saw them. He was aware of—could almost feel Henrietta's Frensham's eyes studying him. They were violet. Her hair was straw-gold. She held one knee clasped in her hands, and he knew her expression, brave but vaguely mystic, as if she expected events that she would endure uncomplainingly for inscrutable ends.

He knew all that without looking. Without even closing his own eyes he could see hers—much more clearly, in fact, than if he looked straight at her in moonlight dimness. But that was natural; he could have drawn her face easily from memory. What irritated him was Wu Tu's eyes, behind hers, seeming to look through them. He decided he had to be brutal and get questions over with.

"Where is your father?" he demanded. He looked suddenly straight at her. She betrayed no surprise, but said nothing. "That's why I'm here," he added, "to find out."

"No other reason?"

Silence. He hated what he had to do, and saw no reason to make a secret of that, but he had not come to answer questions. He ground his heel into the gravel, well aware she was as tense as he was, but was hiding it better. He governed his voice and spoke calmly:

"I've been sent here to ask things, Henrietta. Please answer. What do you know about Wu Tu?"

He did not look at her that time. He preferred to give her a chance to collect her thoughts. He could see Wu Tu's eyes in the dark, and that made him, and kept him, angry. He needed anger, and he was not in the least afraid of Wu Tu's influence. Any number of people can work that trick of impressing mental pictures. Wu Tu's would wear off. In the meantime it kept him alert and made cruelty easier. He added, "You're not accused of anything. I'll not humiliate you if I can help it."

"No?" she answered. "All I actually know of Wu Tu is that you and she completed my humiliation. She turned you against me in less than a week. Then she offered you back to me—on her terms. Blair, I would have believed almost absolutely anything sooner than that you are like that."

"Like what?"

"Someone whom Wu Tu can take and can give."

Their eyes met, and hers were truthful. She was saying what she believed, that she was ashamed to be forced to believe. It suddenly occurred to him to tell her the moonlight made her look nearly naked in that thin smock; but he did not say it, although he would have in other circumstances. She was the only woman who ever had almost seemed more desirable to him than his job. He wondered why, staring at her in silence; until he realized that the nakedness was not really physical but the effect of emotion, hers and his. She was not even trying to hide hers.

"You're entitled to know the truth about that," he said. "I'll explain, if you wish."

"Officially? Or am I to believe it?"

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away.

"I will believe you, Blair. I can bear to hear anything. You needn't pretend what you don't feel."

"Wu Tu had nothing to do with it, Henrietta. I left off, because I didn't dare to fall in love with you."

"Why didn't you dare? I was in love with you. I admit it."

"I knew that."

"I meant you should know it. You ran."

"Yes."

"You behaved like Ranjeet Singh in the legend. In the beginning I hated you, so much that I had to think about you. So I did think. Blair, when we met in the dark that night in Bombay and you took my wrist—not my hand, my wrist—you remember?—and dragged me, unwillingly, to look at an almost naked faquir, who resembled a bas-relief against velvet darkness with the firelight dancing on him, then I knew I loved you. I don't know why. I couldn't reason that out. I just knew it. I was fool enough to think you loved me. When you went away so suddenly, you said on duty. I supposed your job made you silent. I thought it was the quietness of strength. I was impatient, but thoroughly happy to wait. Then Wu Tu came."

"To the house?"

"A police constable, of all people, brought a note from her, saying she had important information from you. If anyone but a policeman had brought it, I would probably have ignored it. I had heard of her of course; everyone has. Knowing you have to use all sorts of people in curious ways, I made an appointment to meet her in my tent at the end of the garden. She came by the back entrance, and I kept her waiting because I felt vaguely afraid. She made astonishing offers—money—then, that minute—quantities of money—showed it to me—tried to force it on me."

"What did she want you to do?"

"Betray my father. I refused and she threatened. I've no idea how she knew about you and me, but she said she would deprive me of you, just so that she and I might understand each other. That sounded so incredibly ridiculous that I laughed. But when she was gone—it was too hot to go indoors—I sat there all alone and felt ill with dread. And you only wrote once, you remember—curtly—formally."

"I wrote twice."

"I received one letter."

"Go on. I'm listening."

"WU TU came again. It seemed cowardly to refuse to see her. And besides, I was wretched and wanted to know. She said she would give you back to me, if I would be sensible, as she expressed it. She seemed to know all about you—for instance, how you have nothing beyond your pay. She even knew where you were born, and where you went to school, and the name of a girl in England who inherited a hundred thousand pounds and wrote you love-letters.

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"Then she named some important people whom she hinted she had put where they are through her secret influence. And she offered to show me how to make yours a real career, with orders and decorations and I don't know what else. She made politics and promotion and all that kind of thing sound like a filthy swindle, with a few innocent figureheads manipulated from behind the scenes by blackguards. And she said you know all that, but that you lack the sublety and need a woman to awaken something in you. I might have you back if I would promise to give her my confidence."

"Go on," Blair said. "I'm listening."

"I almost did promise. I thought I might save you from her."

He waited. His eyes smoldered. But they changed, and he looked relieved when she laughed a bit bitterly at her own conceit and added, "But I saw you would have to save yourself. I couldn't do it. It was like this legend of Ranjeet Singh, although I didn't know the legend then. To yield myself would not have cleaned you."

"Cleaned?" he said. He got up and strode to where they were skinning the tiger. It was a slow job. They were not particularly expert, and they were taking great pains not to damage the skin. The old Rangar was arguing with the Bat-Brahmin in a shadow, and the shikarri who, for some reason, had not been allowed to touch the carcass, was looking on scornfully. Blair sent the shikarri hotfoot to his camp for cigarettes and then, himself in shadow, stared at Henrietta. She looked lovely in that moonlight. The sight of her made his arms tremble. He loathed his job more than ever. It would have been so simple to go and make love to her. She would tell him anything he asked, if—

He strode back, feeling and looking ruthless. He stood in front of her with his face in moonlight. She said, "Don't look like that, Blair. You're not cynical. You feel as badly as I do, or you should."

"I told you I'd explain," he answered. "Wu Tu had nothing to do with it, Henrietta. I wrote twice. The second one was a rotten letter to have to write, but you'd have understood. I said honestly that I wasn't in love. Wu Tu may have stolen that second letter. She's capable of it. If so, she simply took advantage of information. She's an opportunist, and she's rather clever. That's the truth—or as much as I can tell you; I can't betray official secrets."

"But you question me like a culprit."

"No, no, not a culprit. If you'd rather, I'll wait till daylight."

"Oh, no, let's not evade it," she objected. "I've been up there on Gaglajung, imagining myself waiting for Ranjeet Singh to return with honor—being silly and romantic—wallowing in sorrow. I knew you were here, so I came down. I'm in a mood for anything. Absolutely anything," she added, "except—"

"Except what?"

"Lies."

"Will you answer three questions?"

"Yes."

"Where's your father?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you get that gold box that was stolen from your bedroom?"

"Father locked it in my suitcase. I didn't know it was missing until I noticed the lock of the suitcase was broken."

"Where did *he* get it?"

"He found it."

"Have you heard from your father?"

No answer, Suddenly: "Wu Tu told me you have been in love with her for ever so long."

"You believe that?"

"I suppose I don't care."

"Well, it's a lie. Look here, Henrietta, you and I had better face this. You're under suspicion."

"What of? *You* suspect me?"

"To a certain extent, yes. I always did. You're a mystery, but it seemed like sacrilege to try to question you."

"Sacrilege? You?"

"Yes. I couldn't fall in love and mistrust you at the same time. So I ran out. I'm not making love now, so don't be afraid. I'm friendly."

"Is that quite true?"

"Yes, it is. But you're as baffling as ever. You never once revealed your real thought."

"Blair, I wanted to have no reserve from you. I wanted to be able to tell you anything you care to ask."

"Tell me now."

"No."

The monosyllable was like the thump of a door shut quietly. He watched her, speaking slowly: "Zaman Ali and a bad gang—Wu Tu and a worse gang—Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu, and certain others are suspected of being concerned in your father's disappearance. Wu Tu possesses a golden figurine that may come from the same source as the box you lost. We have your box. I've seen it. You're here, behaving curiously, to put it mildly. In plain words, you're here looking for something. And you've troubled yourself to charm Grayne and to mystify him until he lets you do just as you please."

"So you've been spying on me?"

"Yes," he answered. "Who is the villager in whose hut you slept?"

The men around the tiger's carcass resembled ghouls at a graveyard feast of flesh.

"You can easily find him."

"I will. What have you been doing up on Gaglajung, in addition to making villagers believe you're a ghost?"

"Don't you think you're a bit ridiculous?" she retorted.

"Yes," he said. "I feel ridiculous, and I hate what I'm doing. But, you see, I want your answer."

"There is none."

"Take your time, Henrietta, and think. If you don't, you may force me to—well, I won't discuss that."

"I have thought. There is no answer."

"May I search your tent?"

"No."

IN THE darkness a man with a little bagpipe began blaring a tune. Several men lit torches. Two men took the tiger-skin and bore it between them toward Henrietta, thrusting the head forward for her fingers to touch. She understood what they wished: She stood up and laid her right hand between the pugnacious ears, speaking in Rajasthani;

"Be this then the end of Ranjeet Singh. He is forgiven."

The old Rangar, coughing to hide embarrassment, stood forward, bowing: "If the presence will—there is a little thing—it is not far—I am ashamed of these superstitious people, but—"

"Why not?" She stepped forward. The Bat-Brahmin seized a torch from a man and shook it. The bagpipe blared and the Bat led forward to the dark gorge, singing the ballad of Ranjeet of the Ford. And the crowd that had grown to forty or fifty people trailed along behind, excited, singing through their noses.

It was nothing incomprehensible to them that Henrietta Frensham should be a brigadier-general's daughter, and a ghost, and a reincarnation of Ranjeet, Singh's self-immolated widow, all at the same time. There was a god in the jungle who knew all about it, so they did the pleasantly discreet thing, and walked in procession to put streaky paint, sweet oil and cow-pats on his image. It was magic, which has nothing to do with ascertainable or concrete fact, and does not call for explanation.

Night in the throat of the gorge grew crimson with the torch-flare that glittered on frightened wild eyes amid rocks and undergrowth. They climbed a well worn path, disturbing sleeping birds, until the trees ceased and they were again in moonlight on the lap of a flank of Gaglajung. There the shrine nestled—a mere godlet's nest of white stone under one lone tree, where the bats wove tapestry for unseen powers of the night. A monstrous wall of rock, outleaning like a man's breast, loomed, pale in moonlight, and spread downward toward the jungle.

Peace breathed fragrance. An old hermit, gray-haired and gray-bearded, mild-eyed, mad and friendly, came forth from the shrine and looked on. Two young women suddenly appeared where nothing except darkness had been. Night, it had seemed, created them with strings of heavy-scented garlands in their hands; they hung garlands around Henrietta's neck and then—impudently daring—around Blair's, standing on tiptoe to do it and then running away to hide and giggle in the darkness.

Then the ceremony—short—casual with the smooth-worn accuracy of the countless years—simple, as all good ceremonies are. The hermit blessed the tiger-skin; the Bat-Brahmin ordered it and then made irreverent sounds to disparage the hermit and call attention to himself. They all knew the moods of Bat-Brahmins and there was enough generous low laughter to flatter the man's self-esteem; the hermit's blessing was in no way qualified by that. The shikarri, sweating and heavy-breathing, brought the cigarettes and Blair gave one to Henrietta, studying her eyes by the light of the match as he held it in cupped hands.

"My camp's not far," he said. "Suppose we walk there. After we've talked I'll have ponies saddled and see you back to the Graynes' camp."

She nodded. Words leaped to his lips; he had hard work not to say them. Pagan emotion had hold of him. It moved him strangely. It was good, and he knew it was good. He threw away the match and lighted another as an excuse to turn his back. That way he regained self-control.

"Come along," he said presently, forcing his voice. He did not trust himself to add one more word.

Blair led. He was unaware that his back, and the poise of his head, and his shoulders, and the resolute swing of his stride in the smoky torchlight, pained Henrietta almost beyond endurance. The foot-track along the dry bed of the stream was narrow and winding; it was easier to walk one by one. To have followed her might have saved him the strain of imagination. To his mind's eye she seemed lovelier than she really was; no woman could be quite as beautiful as he imagined her. And she seemed to him more defenseless than a woman of her high character possibly could be in his hands. He knew she loved him; she had said so. He was tremendously attracted to

her and he was not sure he was not really in love with her.

Was it true that he had behaved like Ranjeet Singh of the legend? Had he, even unintentionally, by his conduct, given her the right to believe he loved her? Probably. Had he played her false? Had he tried to buy his liberty with the price of her honor? He could not see how. He was going to have to be brutal to her now, at any rate, so he denied himself the luxury of even one backward glance at her. He strode like a Roman.

THE tent glowed with lamplight. There were two chairs under the awning, with a table between. He had forgotten the garlands on his shoulders; his servant removed those when he reached the tent. Then he turned deliberately, giving Henrietta time to control herself before their eyes met. Mellow moonlight—lamp glow—garlands, and the simple line of her frock—stillness and purple shadows—

"Damn!" he said. "You look like a Madonna." But he used the word at random; she was pagan and looked like temptation itself. "Sit down, won't you? Drink? I've whisky and soda. Tea then?"

"Nothing."

The servant put the cigarette box on the table and Blair dismissed him. Little groups of people standing in the shadows vanished. A pony, somewhere in darknesss, snorted and strained at his picket; a *sais* reproved him, and after that there was no other noticeable sound. The stillness, that is made of infinitely tiny voices, waited, and the stars seemed to wait too. Blair's voice, when he forced himself to speak, was almost deadly restrained:

"What's the use, Henrietta?"

Her voice sounded hopeless. "Nothing's any use, Blair, not between us."

"Anyhow, making a mystery isn't," he answered. "If you were worried about your father"—

"I am."

"Are you? Either you know where he is, or you've heard from him, or he has told you not to worry and has given a reason. If not, you'd behave differently. I've to find him. Is it sensible to put yourself to the damned indignity, and me to the indecency of having you watched? I can do that. I'd rather go to hell than do it."

"You must do as you please."

"I can't do as I please. Neither can you."

"No," she said, "I know that."

"Do you realize that whatever you have in your tent, that you refused just now to let me see, would be known to me in detail before daylight, if—"

"Well, why don't you? Oh, Blair, can't you understand? Are you the only person in the world who's loyal? And to what?" (He remembered that Wu Tu had said almost the same thing.) "Would you tell me any official secrets, that you nevertheless discuss with underlings? Would you even tell me Wu Tu's secrets? If you weren't a policeman—"

"Let's not *if* ourselves into a metaphysical maze," he interrupted. "I am a policeman. I've had easier duties than this, I don't mind telling you." Without changing his voice; without the slightest gesture to betray that he had chosen a new angle of attack, he went on: "Chetusingh"—he watched her, and her eyes revealed nothing, but the ends of her fingers flattened slightly on the chair-arm—"has also vanished."

He had not even been sure that she knew Chetusingh, but he saw her guard go up. Her answering sarcastic smile was a moment too late: "Did you propose to search my tent for him?"

"No," he answered: "I hadn't thought of it."

She waited.

He paused, very carefully selecting from the inquisition pincers.

"You haven't told me," he said, "all that Wu Tu told you."

"No, Blair, I haven't. Why not ask *her*?"

"Why are you willing," he demanded, "to sit here and be questioned, when its obviously painful? You didn't have to come here with me. There were plenty of people up there on the hill who could have seen you safely back to Graynes' camp."

She hesitated, thought a moment, and then answered with a smile that mocked her own torment:

"It seemed a possible opportunity to fall out of love with you, Blair."

"Why?" he asked brutally.

"I fell in,"

"Are you out now?"

"Does it matter?"

"You've no intention of telling me anything?"

"Blair, it isn't you, it's the policeman I can't tell."

"So you do know."

"I don't admit that."

"Well, Henrietta, is isn't I, but the policeman who's asking questions. Personally I wouldn't probe your secrets. If I did dream of doing it because they're interesting and you're you, I wouldn't do it in this way. But I'm obliged to be impersonal and insist."

"It's no use insisting—not the slightest use, Blair. But go on being impersonal."

"Why?"

"It helps me."

"You mean, if I were to put this on a personal basis you'd find it easier to tell me?"

"How should I know? You haven't tried it. I might find it much more difficult to ask. I don't know what would happen."

He got out of his chair and stood in front of her, holding his left wrist in his right hand behind his back, there being some emotions that demand more than mental restraint. He knew she would not resist if he should throw his arm around her. She was almost openly inviting him to do it. But he was one of those men whom temptation makes more obstinate the more it tortures. His shadow darkened her. Her gaze met his. Beyond or within her violet eyes he seemed to see Wu Tu's. He remembered what Wu Tu wanted him to do. If Henrietta had been any other woman—

"Are there terms on which you would tell?" he demanded suddenly.

"No. None." Her voice broke and he felt like a devil, so he spoke to her gently, not appreciating that the only merciful thing he could have done would have been to unleash anger and act like a cad. Then, perhaps, she might have ceased to love him.

"You're tired," he said. "Perhaps in the morning you'll feel able to talk. I'll order the ponies saddled."

"Not yet."

HE SUPPOSED she wanted time to recover self-control, so he walked to and fro in the moonlight, keeping his face averted each time he turned. When he stopped and stood in front of her again she was holding her hands before her eyes, but she was not sobbing.

"I wish to God you weren't you," he said grimly. "If you were any other woman "

"Yes, I know," she answered. She was dry-eyed. "If I were any other woman you would make love and coax me to tell what I know. I wish you had tried that, so that I could despise you. But you're an honorable brute. Why are *you* here, not some other man?"

"Damned if I know."

"I will tell you. You can no more help yourself than Pontius Pilate could. There are forces that—"

He interrupted with a gesture of anger. "See here, Henrietta. We had all that out a year ago. Your mysterious forces are not what I'm here to talk about. I don't believe in them. You may keep all those secrets. Tell me what has happened to your father."

"But I don't know."

"Tell me what you think has happened to him."

"No. You wouldn't understand me."

Nothing enrages a man more than to be told that by a woman. But self-control was almost automatic with Blair; he answered quietly, in a gloved voice that had no resonance:

"Very well. You'll have to take the consequences. You and I will both regret that. I'll order the ponies."

She stood up. "Blair, I'd rather not ride, if you don't mind. Mayn't your servant see me home? I don't want to talk to you any longer. I couldn't bear it."

"I won't talk."

"I would rather go alone, but you may send as many servants as you please."

"Oh, all right."

All the servants were asleep, or pretending to sleep. None answered his shout. He strode savagely around the tent and awakened them gave his orders eight men and four lanterns. He did not return to Henrietta until they were all near the tent in a sleepy group, staring and silent.

"Protection?" she asked. "So many? Or is it—"

"They make the good-by less embarrassing," he said stiffly. "Good night, Henrietta. I am sorry I had to ask questions—much more sorry you didn't answer them."

"Good night, Blair." They did not even shake hands. She walked away, two tall men with lanterns leading, two men on either side of her armed with ancient Rajput swords, and two more men with lanterns bringing up the rear. She looked like a prisoner, and the garlands hanging in long loops from her shoulders unexplainably increased the effect. Her hands, clasped behind her, might have been tied. Her fair hair, loose and untidy, shone where the moonlight sprayed its straying ends.

Blair took hold of the pole of the tent awning, and his eyes followed her, even after she had vanished in the gloom beyond a veil of moonlit dust, until he realized that the pain in his hand came from squeezing the pole. Then he swore and sat down.

He sat for two hours, almost without moving, trying to ponder the problem but thinking about her all the time, until the servants returned and reported her safe in her tent in the Graynes' camp.

"Did she say anything?"

"No, sahib."

"No message for me? Are you sure?"

"No, sahib. She entered her tent and came out again to give each of us a little money. Then we asked permission to return hither and she nodded. It is your honor's pleasure that we return now to our beds?"

"Yes."

Blair sat still, watching the purple shadows lengthen and grow darker as the moon descended toward the high hills on his left hand. He felt lonely and weird. His anger, long ago evaporated, had left a sense of mental emptiness and futility. Gaglajung, on the right, became a soot-black, solemn fang upreared against the stars. After a while it resembled an enormous woman's face in profile—coarse nose pointed skyward—coarse, impudent lips.

The stars grew brilliant on the darkening sky. Blackness crept into the shadows. The sparse trees grew one with the night. Then, in front of him, again he saw Wu Tu's eyes, but he marked a change. They seemed farther away than usual—less human—more real larger—too large and too high from the ground to be hers or an animal's. They became pale green, moving against a background of impenetrable gloom. He had not before seen them move in that way, independently of the movement of his own eyes. They made him shudder.

He felt for the bruise on the back of his head, suspecting that the blow received at Wu Tu's might have affected his vision: he had heard of that happening to a man. But the bruise had healed, and his eyes felt all right. Then he reached for a cigarette, but instead of lighting it he went into the tent and brought out a service revolver. He sat down again and examined the loading. Then he looked again for those eyes in the dark. They were there.

They were enormous—no longer in the least like Wu Tu's. Their movement was irregular. It was stealthy. They were coming toward him—high up—twenty feet from the ground. He could see nothing beneath them—no head—merely eyes, of a luminous, disgusting, cruel green, like a light he had once seen in a cavern where a faquir wrought obscene miracles. They suggested a dank smell, but he knew that was imagination because he could smell the good earthy scent of the dew on the dust.

He could hear nothing except ordinary night sounds, such as the wing-whirr of insects and the high, excited, almost inaudible squeak of bats. An owl hooted two or three times. The eyes came nearer. He began to feel deathly afraid and thought of summoning the servants, but dismissed that thought the moment it crossed his mind.

THE moon vanished beyond the hump of a hill and utter darkness swallowed the last shadows. Then the pale light of the nionstrous eyes increased. He could see they were set in a man's head—or a head like a man's—a giant's, but too small for a man twenty feet high. It seemed to be suspended in air. Its movement was slow, elastic, partly from side to side with a swaying effect.

The face was thin, mean, livid. It had a straggling beard. It resembled the face of a tortured and decapitated hillman he had seen near Quetta, its beard matted with blood; only this one was alive and moved haggard lips. It drew nearer. The eyes glared malign intelligence of unintelligible horrors; their loathsome irises looked dull blood-red; but it was difficult to tell their real color because the ghoulish green predominated. Presently the gloom beneath the head grew vaguely luminous, and then horror crept up Blair's spine until his short hair rose and he sat rigid, not breathing, with his heart thumping.

He could see the thing's body. It resembled a slimy black bag, shaped like a stomach. The thing was an octopus. It walked on six snake-like tentacles of prodigious length. There were suckers on them that opened and closed with rhythmic movement, each one separately. The two foremost arms reached and writhed slimily green through the dark. He could feel one of them stirring the air within ten paces. He couldn't move. He couldn't take his eyes off the face. It seemed to see him and yet not to see him—to be conscious of him—to be feeling for him. Perhaps it was blinded by the light of the tent, but it stared like a ghoul in the depths of a dark sea.

Suddenly he thought of Wu Tu—saw a mental picture of her coiled on her lounge in Bombay. He dismissed that with an almost panic effort of will, he did not know why; but he felt urged to think of her and he rebelled against it. The face was coming nearer. One of the long arms almost touched him. The thing danced—as an octopus does—as big spiders do—with the pitiless, absolute rage of malice—slowly—on the tips of its outspread tentacles. He could see the thing's teeth.

Suddenly he thought of Henrietta. He was instantly bathed in relief that she was not there. The relief relaxed him. He remembered the revolver then. He cocked it, rested it on his left elbow, aimed carefully and fired straight at the thing's face. It vanished. There was utter and instant darkness where it had been. The noise of the shot awoke his servants; he could hear them scurrying out of their tents. But Blair's attention was riveted on something else.

Ten feet away, directly in front of him in the glow from the tent lamp, a man stood smiling. Blair, sweating, trying to control his muscles that wanted to tremble, covered the man with the revolver and held it fairly steady. It was several seconds before he could force himself to speak.

"Come here," he commanded then. *"Idhe-rao."*

Then he recognized the man from the Salween country, Taron Ling, who took service with the police commissioner in Bombay on the strength of a forged testimonial.

"You?" he said, getting command of his voice. "What are you doing here?"

Taron Ling strode forward with quiet insolence, making no salaam or any gesture of respect. Two of Blair's servants, looking scared, with their turbans awry, approached the man from either side, and there were other servants peering around the tent, but he ignored them all.

"Doing?" he answered. "Doing nothing. Am come seeking service."

"What as?"

"Guide. Without me, you not finding Henrietta."

"Damn your impudence! Is that the way you speak of her? Where are your manners? Where's your chit from the commissioner?"

"Not have any."

"Ran, eh?"

"No, not running. Seeing you shoot tiger—good shot—shooting me, no—bad shot. You like what you just now see?" The man's smile was that of a blackmailer; there was threat behind it.

Blair's servants, observing the revolver, drew their own deductions and surrounded the man from behind. Nothing increases a man's panic like a weapon ready to be used. Blair uncocked the revolver and laid it on the table to calm his own nerves. He beckoned to the man to come closer and sat studying him in the lamp glow. He was dresssed in a khaki tunic suit and a nondescript turban that offered no clue to his classification. His slightly Mongolian eyes were as bright as a snake's and alive with amused intelligence.

"So you followed me, eh?"

The man nodded.

"How did you know where I went?"

"Knowing also where Sahiba Henrietta went. Why not? Knowing Wu Tu. Knowing Zaman Ali. Knowing where to look for Frennisham Bahadur. Knowing too much."

"Do you know Chetusingh?"

The man nodded again. Somehow or other his nod suggested tragedy, but Blair was not quite trusting his imagination at the moment. He decided that he would follow that suspicion later.

"What do you mean by saying you will guide me to the Sahiba Henrietta? Do you mean to her tent?"

"You knowing soon enough," he answered, insolent—confident.

Blair decided to reduce that confidence. He needed time, too, to replenish his own. He gave orders to a Rajput retainer, whose mission in life was to clothe obedience with the cloak of courage and to adorn both with dignity:

"Keep this man under close observation until I send for him again. Give him a tent to himself and don't let him speak to anyone."

"Shall I tie him, sahib?"

"Only if he makes trouble. Tell the cook I'll take *chota hazri* now."

"Hookum hai."—(It is an order.)

Taron Ling offered no resistance.

Tea came twenty minutes later. Blair drank it hot, grateful that it scalded his throat and made life real again, while he watched the false dawn gimmer on the broken fanged summit of Gaglajung.

Chapter Six

It is useless to try to descend into knowledge or to seek it except we ascend toward it. They who are reputed to know most and who demand to be honored accordingly, are gatherers of shadows. They who truly know, know this: the known is but the shadow of the Unknown. It is therefore nothing.

—From the Eighth of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

THE Rangar came at dawn, his old eyes looking as if they lacked sleep. Beneath his formal courtesy there lurked a hint of foreboding. He nervously avoided Blair's gaze. He turned his back on Gaglajung. He sat on a camp-stool in the delicious cool light of early morning and watched Blair but pretended not to, croakily criticizing the camp servants.

"By God, when I went soldiering we cleaned camp at cock-crow. By daybreak, if there was dung left in the horse-lines, someone heard about it."

Other than the customary politeness about Blair's health, he asked no questions. His eyes did not rest for more than a moment on the tent where Taron Ling lay, but he sat where he could detect a movement of the tent-flap without turning his head. The Indian night that has a hundred thousand eyes had evidently kept him well informed. He awaited events. Thirty minutes after daybreak his young grandson arrived, on a lean pony from the direction of the ford, dismounted and squatted at the old man's feet. A servant led the pony away. The boy said nothing, but the old Rangar seemed to understand

his silence, although he, too, made no remark.

Grayne came a few minutes after that, cantering. His horse's legs and belly were wet from splashing through the ford, but he reined in as if in no hurry at all, when he drew near the camp. He looked peculiarly unofficial in polo helmet, shirt and riding-breeches. He wore smoked spectacles, but removed them before shaking hands, which he did rather diffidently, as if not quite sure it was expected of him. He merely nodded to the Rangar, who stood up and bowed.

Blair received him with the smile of old acquaintance: "Having a good time? Enjoying your leave?"

"So, so. Making the best of it. Couldn't afford England. Bought too many expensive books the last year or two."

That looked probable. He had the eyes of a bookish man—searchers of others' opinions—friendly, sympathetic, intelligent, not dynamic—perhaps lazy in some ways.

"Shooting?" Blair asked as they sat down together.

"Not much. Reading and writing mostly. Hear you shot a tiger last night."

"Yes. How's Henrietta Frensham?"

"Apropos of tigers? I don't know how or where she is. I came to speak about her."

"Isn't she in your camp?"

"No. She should be, but she didn't sleep there. My servant told me your men brought her home, long after midnight. As a matter of fact, I heard her. It was so damned hot I was lying without a stitch on, so I couldn't come out to speak to her. My wife was asleep in her own tent. I imagine I fell asleep pretty soon afterwards.

"I like to watch the sunrise, so the boy has orders to call me in plenty of time for it, and I take tea in pyjamas outside the tent. My wife usually joins me, and Henrietta sometimes does. This morning I wanted to talk to her, so I sent to see if she was awake. She wasn't there. Nobody has seen her leave camp. So I rode over to ask what you know."

"Funny time to want to talk to her," Blair suggested.

"Better time than any other. She sometimes actually talks at daybreak, instead of listening and saying nothing. Doris and I have respected her silence, of course. It's comprehensible. She probably feels much worse about her father's disappearance than she cares to reveal to anyone—even her friends. I've let her do pretty much as she pleases."

"So I hear," Blair answered. "What did you have in mind to say to her at daybreak?"

Grayne looked vaguely uncomfortable. He did his best to look judicious—leaned back, lighted a cigar, pursing his lips on the butt.

"There's a limit," he said. "She's a damned nice girl, although unusual. To put it mildly, she's unconventional. But I'd trust her anywhere, in nearly any circumstances." He blew smoke through his nose. "I don't believe there's a soul on this countryside who'd harm her. But she overdoes it. I mean, for instance, where the hell is she now? Home in the early hours—off again before daybreak without a word to anyone—tigers, you know—snakes—besides, who'd bet there aren't dacoits in the hills? There probably aren't, but there might be. Doris and I don't mind her missing meals or anything like that, but—well, I ask you."

Blair waited. He was not there to be asked, but to find out. Grayne continued:

"Between you and me, I object to her going where I myself couldn't go without a special warrant and probably couldn't get that. To give you an idea of what I mean—when I put in for long leave and told 'em I meant to spend it here, I was cautioned—just as if I'd been a probationer fresh from home—on no account to poke my nose into places regarded as sacred.

"They knew I'm interested in that kind of thing and they ticked me off like a recruit. I haven't even been up on Gaglajung. You know the legend? I'd intended to look for the secret passage that the three kings forced Ranjeet Singh to betray. Of course I couldn't in the circumstances. However, I've reason to believe that Henrietta goes into all sorts of places, Gaglajung included. Crypts. Caverns. God knows where she goes."

"You say you've reason to believe it?"

"Good reason. One of my specials saw her, week before last, being led by a local priest into a place at the back of a shrine near here that only Brahmins are supposed to enter. What does that mean?"

"What do you think it means?"

"Well, I'd say she's quite likely looking for her father. You know, there's a [illegible]ue report of his having been seen hereab[illegible]. I don't believe it. But perhaps she does. She seems to be on good terms with the local priests and peasantry. That's all very well, of course; but you know, I'd be in the devil of a mess if anything should happen to her. I'd be put on the mat, and no two ways about it. As her host, it would be a bit awkward for me to have to—dammit, you know what I mean—she's—Have you any influence with her?"

Blair avoided the question:

"Did you examine her tent?" he answered.

"No."

"Why not?"

"It didn't occur to me. Why should I?"

"So you don't know if anything's missing?"

"No."

"Would your wife know if there were anything missing?"

"She might. She might know what to look for. I wouldn't."

THE Rangar was watching. Blair, to appear casual, struck a match on the heel of his boot and lighted a cigarette. He was almost sick with a sense of dread, so he contrived to look rather cheerful.

"Don't look at me," he said. "Look at that kite over there on the dead tree, as if we were talking about that. Go back and get your wife to search Henrietta's tent. Take care that your servants don't see what you're doing. Write me a full report at once; I'll endorse and forward it to the proper quarter."

"Good God, man, do you think—"

"I'm thinking."

"I mean—"

"Yes, I know what you mean. She had a servant, I suppose. Where is he?"

"In camp. It was he who first suggested that she might have returned here to talk to you, since she was here last night. Do you mean you think—"

"Did he see her leave camp?"

"No. He was asleep under the fly of her tent when your men brought her home. I suppose they told him where she'd been. She told him he was not needed, so he went off to sleep in the servants' quarters. Their tents are about fifty yards from ours. He had no notion she was gone again until I sent for him."

"Has Henrietta said anything to you about her father?"

"We've discussed him, of course. The impression I got was that it hurt her to talk about him. Doris put a damper on that topic of conversation; she called me a tactless brute. Henrietta isn't what I'd call garrulous at any time; the only pointer I remember her giving was when she said, a few days ago, that her father might have been a lieutenant-general by now if he wasn't such a student of Indian magic. But when I questioned her about that she shut up."

"What was your line of interrogation?"

"Stupid, I daresay. I asked if she thought it possible that Frensham might have fallen foul of some of those sorcerers who like to keep their tricks a deadly secret. They might have killed him for discovering a trick. She said Frensham had never been interested in faked miracles. Then she shut right up. You know her better than I do. You know how she shuts up."

"Why do you call that a pointer?"

"Perhaps it isn't. But it's full moon tomorrow night. It makes some women restless, you know. It makes her restless. I don't know whether she's superstitious about it or not. But she has it marked on the calendar, and she told us not to worry if she should go out to study the full moon, and should be gone quite some time. If it's your business, I wish like the devil you'd put a kibosh on her wandering around the country. It 'ud be damned unpleasant for me to have to do it. Can you?"

"If it isn't too late," Blair answered. "Have you had breakfast?"

"All I ever take, thanks."

"Go and search her tent, then. Search it thoroughly, and send me a written report. Keep it secret. Say nothing whatever to her if she turns up. Can you trust your wife to hold her tongue?"

"Certainly."

"All right. See you later."

Grayne rode away, looking gloomy. Blair studied the Rangar; he had the painter's trick of looking sideways at what he was observing carefully. A servant brought the camp-stool close and the Rangar sat down.

"That was a good tale you were telling last night." Blair began. "Ranjeet of the Ford seems to have been a strange character."

"Ah, but his ghost is quiet now, sahib."

"You say he was a law to himself. In what way do you mean that?"

"Hah! He used to override the Brahmins. He respected them not at all. It is a pity there are none nowadays who have that courage. It was Ranjeet of the Ford who gave the Bats the Brahmin privileges that they claim to this day. He is said to have learned a Brahmin secret—some say by torture. It is known that he slew a Brahmin and put a Bat in his place. And it is said that because of that a Brahmin betrayed him to the three kings, intending Ranjeet should be slain by them, so that his stolen secret might die with him. But the Bats—or so men say—already knew it. The Bats are worse than pukka Brahmins. They have no sense of responsibility. But they know the Brahmin law. The people groan, but submit to extortion."

"My father—" said Blair. He threw away his cigarette and looked straight in front of him. He had reached a decision. He spoke quietly, in a level voice. "I need your confidence."

The old man looked startled. He stared.

"By Allah," he answered after a moment, "there is none to whom I give that more willingly."

"Because I believe that, I asked it. Where is Miss Frensham?"

"Nay, I know not. Before God, and by my beard, I know not."

"But you knew she is missing?"

"One said something of the sort. So I came hither to learn more of the matter."

"Who spoke of her?"

"One in the dark, whose name I know not, nor who he is, nor anything at all about him. It happened I lay cursing the heat that frets these old bones. I bethought me of that tiger-skin, that is pegged in my yard awaiting alum. It might be sore temptation to someone desiring claws against the evil eye. I went out in the dark to be sure the watchman was awake. And as I spoke with the watchman a voice cried, 'Ranjeet's wife walks, seeking for her lover. Spirits of the dead are leading her from Gaglajung.'

"Whoever had spoken stole away into the dark. But the watchman also had heard him, so he and I considered the matter. We knew, because such news travels fast, that the Frennisham sahiba had been taken to Grayns' camp by your honor's servants. And so I bethought me should she then come thence toward Doongar she must use the footpath that leads over the shoulder of Gaglajung. Is it not my business to know what happens? I sent a messenger. He, going and returning swiftly, told me the sahiba is missing from her tent, wherein she had not slept. So I came hither."

"Do you know a man from the Salween country by the name of Taron Ling?" Blair asked.

"No." The Rangar looked uneasy. Morning mauve had vanished. The sharp, hot, golden sunlight limned him mercilessly; it revealed fear. The young grandson took the old man's hand and watched him feeling, not comprehending.

Blair lighted his pipe. "Let the child sit yonder under that tree," he said after a moment. Then he called to his servant, "Bring forth Taron Ling!"

The Rangar shuddered. He had let down the bars of confidence in response to Blair's request. But he had not revealed all he knew—not by the width of the gulf between East and West, between youth and old age.

TARON LING came leering at the men who guarded him. Blair dismissed them.

"Have you received food? Were you made comfortable?"

"Yes."

"You address me as sahib."

"Smite him in the teeth!" said the Rangar. "By Allah—" His voice grumbled away into silence when Taron Ling looked straight at him.

"Yes, sahib," said Taron Ling.

"Tell the Zemindar Abdurrahman Khan that which you told me before daybreak."

The semi-Mongolian eyes conned the old man's face curiously. "I came seeking service," he said slowly, "as a guide."

"To find what?" Blair demanded.

"Frennisham sahiba."

"And—"

"Frennisham bahadur."

"And—"

"Nothing else."

"Beware of him!" warned the Rangar *sotto voce*. "This one is an *ibilis*—a *dugpa* they call such, where *he* learned magic. He is from hell. He should be sent back."

"You spoke," said Blair, "of Wu Tu and of Zaman Ali."

The man nodded.

"Do you know where they are?"

He nodded again. Although he stood more or less at respectful attention he exuded the scorn of olympian knowledge.

"Do you know where Chetusingh is?"

"You finding all that out," he answered.

The Rangar spoke up, almost slobbering with nervous anger: "There is but one course—flog him! Allah! I have seen such as him flayed and pegged amid the flies before the devil left them! He and a Bat-Brahmin hereabouts are two of one liver. Flog him, sahib!"

Blair stared at the Rangar. Such hysteria as that suggested either genuine information or else total ignorance. In either event interrogation was the wrong course; the old man needed strength to lean on.

"True," he said, "he knows a trick or two. He does them rather well. He fooled me badly, shortly before daylight. He may even be able to do the rope trick that we've heard about so often—you know—throw a rope in the air, climb it, vanish and pull the rope up after him. He's probably a particularly skilful hypnotist. At any rate, he knows how to trick imagination—once. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing," said the Rangar. "God forbid that I should know about him."

Plainly he did know something, but would not tell. He had known about Brigadier-General Frensham's disappearance. How? Why? Perhaps Henrietta Frensham had told him. But he had also known, before Blair knew it, that Henrietta, too, had vanished; and his tale of a voice in the dark was unconvincing.

"Send for the Bat-Brahmin," Blair commanded.

"Sahib, he would not obey me."

"Very well, I will go myself and find him."

"Sahib—"

"Yes?"

"That is unwise."

"Wisdom isn't always commendable," said Blair. "Patience isn't always a virtue, either. Care to come with me?"

"Come alone!" advised Taron Ling in a voice like a bell. He had a quick understanding of English. He used it well enough when not deliberately misusing it.

"He will deceive you," the Rangar warned. "He is a devil, that one."

Blair stood up, eye to eye against Taron Ling. He had an impulse to punch him, but that was easy enough to restrain. A subtler impulse almost made him hesitate to trespass where the Rangar feared to intrude. He saw Wu Tu's eyes again, behind Taron Ling's, fading and reappearing, fading again, as if two influences struggled for control.

"Can you work your tricks by daylight?" he demanded.

The Rangar objected. "No, no! In the name of God, no!"

Taron Ling looked haughty. "Tricks?" he answered. "You will say I trick you if I show you Frennisham sahiba?"

"When?"

"Now."

"Show me."

Suddenly Blair saw Henrietta, although the vision was more distinct than natural eyesight. She looked unhappy and yet curiously excited. The strange thing was, that he could see everything else, including Taron Ling, quite normally; but whichever way he turned his head he could still see Henrietta. Her surroundings were shadowy, and in the shadow, to one side of her, was the Chinese girl who attended the upstairs door at Wu Tu's house in Bombay.

There were other people in the shadows, but he could not distinguish them. The vision had the quality of a vivid dream. The color of Henrietta's frock changed as he watched—changed repeatedly. First she was wearing the loose sort of tennis-frock of the night before, then the rose-colored evening dress of that night in Bombay when he had dragged her to see the faquir, then the tennis-frock again.

The vision vanished. Taron Ling spoke: "Trick?" he demanded.

Anger stirred Blair strangely. There is no worse insolence on earth than interference with another's mental processes. He had asked for it, but he did not like it any better for that. Even though his reason told him this was only an extension of the art by which a story-teller conjures visions in an audience's mind, he hated the imposition—loathed it. He was about to speak savagely and act drastically. It crossed his mind to arrest Taron Ling—there was plenty of law to permit it—and to send him under close arrest to Bombay for the commissioner to deal with. But a messenger came.

He saw the man running from the direction of Doongar village with a telegram in a cleft stick, so he waited and went into the tent for his pipe, cursing himself because his hand trembled while he filled it. He felt sick, and horribly scared on Henrietta's account. Through the tent opening he saw the Rangar walk away and sit down under the tree beside his grandson, leaving Taron Ling standing alone. He wondered, supposing he should arrest the man, who could be found to convey him to railhead. Perhaps Grayne would do it. He wished he had kept Grayne with him a little longer instead of packing him off to search Henrietta's tent.

THE sweating messenger panted to the tent. Blair signed for the telegram, told the man to wait and returned into the tent to read the message. It was in code from the commissioner, and it took him nearly ten minutes to work it out because the signaller had made a mistake in one word, which obliged him to guess. It was a long message, but he worked it out finally:

> **Wu Tu left Bombay two days ago with ticket for Lahore accompanied by twenty women and five men after closing her residence. Shoud she leave train en route she will be followed. Taron Ling on your track. Strongly advise you keep him under observation long as possible before arrest as he is probably a key man. He is well shadowed. Eleven [that meant Howland of the C.I.D.] has sent three specials to watch and help if necessary. No news of Frensham or Chetusingh. Your stolen pass reported found in Calcutta probably intended to mislead investigation. Remember get facts not fireworks. Your reply will be forwarded.**
>
> **o. 9.**

So the commissioner also had left Bombay. That indicated probably swift developments. Blair wrote out an answer in code. That took ten minutes:

> **Henrietta vanished before daylight this morning after inconclusive interview with me. Taron Ling here apparently in league with Bat-Brahmin and producing mysterious phenomena of File FF type. No sign yet of Wu Tu or of specials. Taron Ling claims knowledge and offers to reveal whereabouts of Frensham and Henrietta. Shall accept offer. Recommend swift follow-up unless you hear from me within next twelve hours. Copy of this to Eleven. o88.**

It was reassuring news that Howland had sent three men to lend a hand, in addition

to the two who had been detailed by the commissioner to shadow Taron Ling. That there was no sign of them was nothing to worry about; such men were entirely capable of keeping their identity a secret until the last minute. Even the telegraph runner might be one of them.

As he gave him the two messages and watched him tie them in the cleft stick, he observed him carefully, but there was no signal; he salaamed and trotted away toward Doongar with a corner of a cloth between his teeth. Blair stood staring after him, wondering whether he had said enough in the telegram, and then looked for Taron Ling. The man had vanished.

He called to the Rangar, "Where did Taron Ling go?"

The Rangar got up and walked toward him, looking older than he did at daybreak. The rims of his eyes were red and watery. He was trembling.

"Is it not enough that he *has* gone?" he answered. "Nay. I saw not which way he went."

He could not have gone far. Blair walked around the tent and questioned the servants. None had seen him, or at any rate none admitted it; if they had seen, they refused to say. He sent them scattering in all directions to look for the man, noticing that they went unwillingly. Then he returned to the Rangar, who had sat down on the stool under the tent awning and was staring into vacancy.

"Look here," he said, "you promised confidence."

"You have it, sahib. I have said, beware of that one! Unless he be flogged or slain no good can come of dealing with him. If he returns, I say, thrash him with a horsewhip. That is what I say, and I say it again. Now, if the presence permits, I will take my grandson to the village."

BLAIR let him go. There was nothing to be gained by asking questions that would not be answered. Presently, one by one the servants drifted back and reported no sign of Taren Ling. They were not mutinous, but they had lost élan and had probably not searched far. An atmosphere of dread had invaded the camp. The monotonous bong-bong bong of a coppersmith bird sounded ominous. The cry of a peacock was like a scream of anguish. As the brassy sun grew higher in the heavens, and the hot wind rose, charm deserted the now dried-out countryside and its scorched, dust-covered skeleton glared naked amid tired trees. There was a greenish haze of dust and heat that veiled the view. And through that veil rode Grayne again, like an apparition. He dismounted, blinking behind smoked spectacles, and spoke in a hard, forced voice without preliminary:

"Damned strange business in my opinion. Doris searched her tent, and so did I. Two suitcases gone -soap, towels, toothbrush—all that kind of thing. What's the earthly use of writing *that* in a report? She can't have carried 'em—must have had porters. No note—no message—but her money is all in the steel trunk, and the trunk was unlocked. What do you make of that?"

"Why not write it?" Blair asked. He suddenly felt better. Suitcases? That looked like premeditation. He offered Grayne a cigarette. Grayne glanced keenly at him before answering.

"Well, to tell you the plain truth, old man, you looked rattled first thing this morning. You still do. It occurred to me—she'd been here, hadn't she?—she might have cleared out on your account. She's a queer girl. Did you have a row with her?"

Blair lighted his cigarette, turning his back to the hot wind, to avoid answering. Grayne continued:

"None of my business—but—are you down here to see her? I mean, it might be damned unpleasant for you to have reports go in and—"

Blair interrupted: "Doris expects you back?"

"No."

"She all right?"

"Yes. Doris won't worry—or if she does she'll send a servant to find out."

"Write her a note," said Blair. "I'll send a servant with it. Say you're staying for a few hours to oblige me. Write your report in my tent and put down every detail you can remember—conversations—minor incidents—omit nothing, no matter how unimportant, since Henrietta came to stay with you and Doris. If I'm not back by noon, or if I don't send a message, you'd better take charge and either move my camp over the ford to yours or bring yours over here, no matter which. And if anyone asks for me, say I've gone looking for the Bat-Brahmin of Gaglajung."

"That swine?"

"What do you know about him?" Blair asked.

"Oh, he's a swine, that's all. He'll tell you nothing. He's a saucy impostor, but he isn't dangerous. He makes too fat a living off the peasants to risk it by taking a chance with the police."

"Where will I find him?"

"Lord knows. Anyone will tell you if you ride up to Doongar village. But you may find him at Ganesha's shrine near where you

shot the tiger last night. I'll bet you one rupee to an anna a word that you get no information from him."

Blair ordered his horse saddled and brought to the tent with a mounted *sais* to follow him. While he waited he searched his mind for something else to say to Grayne. But it seemed wiser to say nothing. He could hardly tell him about Taron Ling's phenomenal tricks, and what else was there to say? Suddenly he saw Taron Ling in the distance, on a rock by the track toward Doongar, apparently sitting waiting for him.

"Help yourself to anything you need," he said to Grayne. Then he mounted and rode away, into the scorching wind.

Chapter Seven

> Truth clothes herself in mystery. Wherever ye see a mystery, seek Truth; and ye shall find it as ye found Hope, which none might have known were it not for despair.
>
> —From the Ninth (unfinished) Book of Noor Ali.

THE Rajput attendant who rode behind Blair sat splendidly, but his gray horse betrayed the condition of the man's mind, a weird nervousness passing from rider to beast. The gray horse was as frantic as if tigers were about. He frightened the bay that Blair rode. But that did Blair good; he had to get complete self-mastery in order to control the animal.

A hundred yards before they reached the rock on which Taron Ling sat waiting the Rajput's gray went mad—plunged—reared—cannoned into Blair's horse—almost unseated him—broke a rein and bolted as if all the devils of hell were following. Taron Ling laughed. He was frugal of laughter; one scornful "Hah!" was all he needed to express his kind of amusement. Then he jumped from the rock and started walking rapidly, not toward Doongar village but along a winding track that led toward the dry river-bed, through sparse, hot jungle.

Blair followed, riding slowly in a cloud of flies that were as persistent and disturbing as his thoughts. He had no other weapon than a light riding-whip, and he had an acute premonition of danger. It occurred to him several times to return to the camp for his revolver, but he dismissed that thought after considering it. Taron Ling appeared also unarmed, and might not wait for him.

He was not afraid of the man's hypnotic tricks, extraordinary though they were. He felt fairly sure that now he was on guard, such tricks would not succeed again. He had definite orders to walk straight into any trap he might see, and he felt equally sure he was being led into one—equally sure the Rajput on the gray had thought so too, and had welcomed his horse's panic as the lesser of two evils, even if he had not deliberately encouraged the horse to bolt.

There was probably not much danger. He was under observation; he had a telegram in his pocket that said so; if anything should happen to him, somebody would soon know about it—follow up—rescue. He had a very small sense of his own personal importance in the scheme of things. He was a pawn in the game. The game was playing. He kept Taron Ling in sight until they came to the dry pool in the river-bed where he had shot the tiger the previous night.

It looked different by day. Night's loveliness was a dream that had vanished. The sun was well up. Shortening shadows lay on quartz sand, bleached and drab, except where it sparkled in sunlight; there the glare was painful. There was some relief from the choking hot wind, because of the curve of the tree-lined gorge that formed the river-bed beyond. Where Henrietta had descended in the moonlight from the flank of Gaglajung was a raw, dry scar of glaring boulders; and the stone where he and she had sat was a sun-scorched lump of ruin, tumbled from a dead hill. It resembled a tooth.

The remains of the tiger were black with flies. A dozen vultures took wing clumsily—gorged, filthy scavengers that had stripped the dead brute's bones as clean of flesh as the daylight had stripped the scene of romance. Gaglajung, up aloft on the right, resembled dry bones breaking through the back of a decaying hill.

Taron Ling, pausing in full sunlight and facing the gorge, shouted one bell-like monosyllable, as startling as a rifle-shot. It was answered by another, like the bark of a wild dog.

Out from the throat of the gorge a man came walking handsomely with a mountaineer's swing of the loins. He wore a loosely bound gray loin-cloth that revealed his right leg as high as the hip, bronzed and muscular. He looked like a dancer of heroic ballet parts, and carried a short stick like a marshal's baton in his right hand, using that to salute Taron Ling; but to Blair he made no gesture of respect, although he walked up close to the horse and peered at the rider's face. His eyes were as satyr-like as a he-goat's.

"My *chela*," said Taron Ling. "He will take the horse now. He does what I tell him."

THE *chela* seized the horse's rein. Common riot-drill provided a very simple answer to that impudence. But to have kicked the man under the chin would not have revealed the whereabouts of Henrietta. Besides, it was of utmost importance to learn what Taron Ling, if followed, might be able to reveal.

Blair was almost sure he saw a man's face peering between two rocks in deep shadow on the flank of the gorge; there was more than one chance in a hundred that that might be one of the commissioner's men. If not, it was at any rate a witness, who would report what he had seen to someone and set rumor moving; rumor would provide a clue that might be followed; so that, whatever might happen, he would not disappear as Frensham, Henrietta and Chetusingh had done, leaving no clue at all. It seemed wise to ignore the *chela's* action for the moment; and it might not be a bad idea to let Taron Ling think he had established hypnotic control.

"You must come on foot now. He shall take the horse back with a message," said Taron Ling.

"Message from whom?"

"From you."

"To say where we're going?"

"He will know what to say."

"What?"

"He already knows it." He had forgotten to mispronounce English spoke it excellently.

Two heads showed in the shadows, quite distinctly, for a moment. With the corner of his eye Blair saw a hand steal like a snake's head into the sunlight, spread all five fingers three times and withdraw. He knew that signal—answered it, pushing his helmet to the back of his head and wiping his forehead three times with a handkerchief.

It was safe to go forward; the Department was on the watch and would learn whatever happened. An involuntary shudder crept up his spine and along his shoulders, but he contrived to appear casual. He flicked flies off his face with his handkerchief, then freed his right foot from the stirrup.

"Well," he said, "I'm curious. I'll go with you."

He dismounted. The *chela* led the horse away in the direction of the camp without waiting for further orders. Blair felt glad he had left Grayne in charge. Whatever verbal message the *chela* might deliver, even Grayne was hardly likely to accept it without suspicion if there was nothing in writing. Grayne might not be the kind of man who seizes responsibility and acts swiftly on suspicion, but he would either detain the *chela* or else send a servant or two to check up.

"I am ready. Which way?"

Taron Ling immediately turned his back and led up-gorge to the footpath that Blair had taken the night before with Henrietta toward the shrine where the mad hermit had blessed the tiger-skin. Taron Ling, too, had the stride of a mountaineer; he climbed fast. Blair took his own time about following, and let him wait at frequent intervals.

He had a half-hope of getting word with one of the men whom he could distinctly hear following through the jungle on either flank of the gorge. They were making too much noise, and there was no need, as he saw it, for more than one at the moment; he would have liked to send one of them back to the camp with a message to Grayne. He even sat down for a rest, several times, hoping one of the men would creep up close, but they kept their distance, waiting when he waited.

Taron Ling showed no impatience and no inclination to talk, until at last Blair stepped out on the level ledge where the shrine nestled against an almost sheer cliff. There was no sign of the mad hermit, but the Bat Brahmin in freshly laundered white turban and loincloth came forward to meet them. He seemed to have been waiting within the shrine, he appeared so suddenly. He greeted Taron Ling like an old acquaintance and eyed Blair curiously, as if appraising his clothes for their value. In his eyes was the insolent audacity of the professional blessing and cursing-monger, hard with avarice and with experience of human gullibility.

He offered Blair no greeting but turned his back and led toward the shrine, Taron Ling falling behind, so that Blair walked between the two men until they reached the shrine and the Bat-Brahmin faced about in the dim entrance.

There was an argument then. The Bat wanted Blair to take his boots off. He lifted one bare foot repeatedly, smiting the sole with the flat of his hand; but Taron Ling ridiculed him and for a minute or two they looked like coming to blows, paying each other such scurrilous compliments that at last Blair intervened to restore peace. The dispute had served his present purpose; he had waited in the dim shrine entrance long enough for the commissioner's men to watch which way he took and who was with him. The Bat-Brahmin, as a notorious character, could hardly be improved on as a link in a chain of evidence.

He had no objection to removing his boots. He had often done that in religious buildings. But it occurred to him to see what Taron Ling would do if he refused; so he ordered the Bat-Brahmin out of the way and told Taron Ling to lead on in. Taron Ling shoved the Bat aside roughly. The Bat screamed

like a beast; his outraged eyes almost popped from his head, but he thought better of striking back although he raised his right hand. He entered last, muttering obscenities with lips that slobbered malice. He had mad eyes. He seemed to be on the verge of an epileptic fit. Taron Ling kept calling him names that might have made even a sane man mad with anger.

THE shrine was not nearly large enough to be called a temple, but it had beautiful fluted columns and its walls were covered with carvings of the Hindu pantheon, the greater part of them monstrously obscene to western eyes. There was an atmosphere of peace, a reek of faded flowers, a heavy silence and, in the gloom at the rear amid the dimness of smoky oil-lamps, the genial image of the god Ganesha, elephant-trunked, pot-bellied, competent of judgment. The old mad hermit sat beside the image, too mad, too meditative to notice anyone except the Bat, at whom his eyes smiled like a child's who sees his mother.

The back wall of the shrine was the mountain rock that had been quarried perpendicular and carved like the rest of the walls. It was impossible to see into the soot-black shadow behind the image, but it seemed strange that the image should be set forth from the wall. It stood three feet forward from it. Taron Ling's irreverence seemed more than casual: he even spat on the floor at the foot of Ganesha. But it was rather a serious matter for a police officer in uniform to invade such a place without definite orders to do it, and Blair hesitated, peering into the gloom, until he saw that behind the image the rock wall had been left uncarved.

There was a smooth place, of lighter color, of the same size as the image. At the base of the wall there remained a projecting ledge of the same height and width as the built up base in front of it on which the image actually rested and looked like an afterthought. In the rock wall, curiously placed amid the carvings, there were two big forged iron rings of ancient make and no obvious purpose. Blair, as he followed Taron Ling into the gloom, stumbled and nearly fell over a coil of thick rope.

Then there was another altercation with the Bat, who changed his mind about permitting sacrilege. He screamed at Taron Ling. He tried to get in his way. Taron Ling took him roughly by the singlet and tore it as he hurled him backward easily with one hand. According to Hindu religious law there is no worse crime than to strike a Brahmin, and Bats claim Brahmin privileges. But the old hermit took no notice, and there were no other witnesses. The bat stood aside, glaring and muttering, with the light from the entrance making him look half human and half shadow. Taron Ling sprang to the ledge behind Ganesha, placing a hand on the image to steady himself. He offered his other hand to help Blair. Blair thought he detected movement, but he was not sure. He accepted Taron Ling's hand, and as he hauled himself up to the ledge, he too placed his hand on the back of the image. It did move. It rocked, almost imperceptibly. It rested, evidently, on a roller, or rollers, of stone or iron. Those rings in the wall were for the rope. Ganesha's image could be hauled back flat against the wall and probably one man, or at any rate two, could do it.

Then the reason why revealed itself. Taron Ling stood astride of a dark hole, oval shaped and smooth edged—an undiscoverable hole to whoever regards a sacred image as a thing not to be moved or too closely examined. Taron Ling thrust a leg in the hole to show that there were steps beneath it. He tugged Blair's arm and signed to him to go down.

"Go ahead," Blair ordered.

He obeyed. For a moment Blair hesitated. Why not return to the entrance and try to signal to the men, whose job it was to keep him under observation, to come out of the jungle and follow? He could have done that in less than a minute. Not to do it was to add to the risk he was running. However, he decided those men probably knew their business or they would not have been picked for the job, and Taron Ling, with an arm up through the hole, seized his right foot to guide it downward to the top step. As long as Taron Ling was in front, not behind him, the odds were enough in his favor to make the risk worth taking. So he went into the hole, not squeezing through too easily, and he discovered by their feel that the steps were of rough-hewn rock, irregularly spaced, descending at a steep angle. He was thirsty. He wished he had had a drink before he started out.

He could see backward up through the hole, but not downward. When he hesitated, Taron Ling from beneath took his foot and tried to guide it, but Blair kicked the hand away. Neither man spoke. The heat was suffocating. The dust of dry bat-dung rose with an acrid stench. Blair sat and groped downward one step at a time, beating his hands against the stone from time to time to get the bat-filth off his fingers.

Trying to judge how far he had gone, he glanced upward and saw the Bat-Brahmin's face—or he supposed it was his—a silhouette framed in the egg-shaped hole. After that it grew suddenly darker—then totally dark, and when he looked upward he could see nothing

at all. The Bat had closed the opening. Taron Ling laughed, but the sound had no overtone: it was mirthless.

Then darkness became full of dread. Blair struck a match. Excitement glared in Taron Ling's eyes. The match burned Blair's fingers. He struck another, trying to see upward.

"Can you open that from below?" he demanded.

"No."

"Is there another way out?"

"No."

"Any water?"

"No."

The fear of thirst strikes panic. Blair started to climb upward, but Taron Ling's hand clutched his ankle. He kicked hard. The man clung; he had the strength of a gorilla.

"You obey," said his voice in the dark, "or you die."

BLAIR sat on a step and struck another match. It showed him Taron Ling's face, sweat-wet, grinning with intention. Murder? *What for? Money? He had none.*

"What do you want?" he demanded. Then the match went out. He struck another; there were eight or nine remaining.

"I will have obedience," said Taron Ling. He let go of Blair's ankle and descended backwards on hands and knees into total darkness. When the match burned out he spoke:

"Obey me and live. Disobey me and die. You think"—his voice throbbed and boomed—"that you were followed here, because you saw a signal. You believe those men will come for you, eh? They are Wu Tu's men and Zaman Ali's. I taught them the police signals. Is it likely I should take such pains to trap you, and neglect that? The commissioner's men and Howland's men—oh yes, yes, I know Howland—have been misled. That was a little silly easy matter. You are at my mercy."

"What do you want?" Blair repeated. It was no use wishing he had not come. It was no use waiting until thirst should begin to torture him. He must use his wits while he had any left, and that necessity began to restore his self-control.

"You obey me, not Wu Tu," said Taron Ling's voice.

Thoughts raced through Blair's brain. Why had Taron Ling deliberately quarreled with the Bat-Brahmin? Had there been no other way of inducing the man to haul the image back over the hole and shut them in? As for thirst—his mouth was already dry from fear and the heat and the stench of bat-filth—Taron Ling, too, would feel that presently. Judgment, he knew, and logic are among the first of the human faculties that wilt and vanish under the strain of trespass amid psychic arts that deceive no one more than the practitioner. All competent policemen know that. But even a professed occultist, persuaded by his own hypnotic skill that he was almost superhuman, would be unlikely to defy thirst. Not even a madman would do that. Taron Ling did not seem to be quite mad—yet; the road where madness lies in wait is sometimes long and devious.

He struck another match. Out of the darkness something fell into his lap. It was a human skull.

"Dozens have died in here," said Taron Ling's voice. "This is the secret way to Gaglajung that Rangeet betrayed to the three kings." He tossed up another skull, then another. Blair hurled one skull back into the darkness:

"Damn your eyes," he answered, "get going. What's your game? You know a way out, that's obvious." He realized quite suddenly, and wondered why he had not realized before, that the quarrel had been deliberately timed to make the Bat close up the hole as an act of revenge. Possibly the Bat did not know of another way out. Probably he resented the discovery of a secret that he and his antecedent impostors in office had kept for centuries.

Whatever the secret might be, probably the Bat had welcomed an excuse to conceal it again, and let the intruders die parched in the dark. Conceivably the Bat had been induced to reveal the secret in the first instance—or perhaps the mad hermit had been induced to reveal it—by means of one of Taron Ling's hypnotic tricks. Such tricks bring reaction in their wake. Anger sometimes breaks hypnotic spells; it might have stirred the Bat's evident madness to revolt and revenge. Taron Ling would surely not have run that risk unless he knew, or thought he knew, a way of escape.

Blair's own competently governed anger began to come to his rescue. Why should he have been picked for this job—he of all people—he who hated all things that can not be stated in plain speech? The commissioner had chosen him, knowing his prejudice. Why? Wu Tu had dared to try to hypnotize him. Why him? Why had Henrietta treated him as if he were a disappointing fool without wit or understanding? What the devil did this beast Taron Ling mean by taking such pains to pursue and trap him? Why him? What did it all mean? He would find out. Forward, into the trap. Obey orders!

"Go on!" he commanded. "Lead the way!"

There was a sort of vertigo, as he resisted a mesmeric effort to make him see things in the dark. He threw that off. He went forward,

downward, with a hand on either wall and his riding-whip ready for action.

"Careful!" warned Taron Ling's voice. "Here is danger!"

"Face it then!" he retorted, fighting-angry. He meant to hit the man if he could reach him.

A fight in the dark would be better than views of invisible things that crowded the darkness, as they do in dreams, memories—spaceless, void, intangible—the tiger, the shrine, the Bat's face, the Hermit's, Wu Tu's eyes, the old Rangar and the god Ganesha, the commissioner's iron-gray smile—and then Henrietta.

"Go on!" he commanded. He would not ask questions. He would make the man show him.

He trod on a rolling bone and almost fell, striking his spur upon the last step. He sat down and removed his spurs, began to thrust them in his pocket but threw them away savagely. They fell a prodigious distance; it seemed a minute before he heard them strike on rock beneath him. Then he heard Taron Ling up above him in front, scrambling over loose stones, some of which fell and remeasured the depth of the darkness on his left hand.

He thrust outward to the right with the riding-whip and touched nothing. Groping with his foot, he found the bone that had tripped him. He picked it up. It felt like a human thigh-bone. He threw it away to the right. It fell what seemed an endless distance before he heard it strike bottom. Evidently he was on a ledge between two precipices, and he hated precipices. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled forward. The ledge was irregular. In one place it was less than a foot wide; but it was only about twenty feet long and he soon found a rough, sloping ramp at the end that led sharply upward. Remembering there were loose stones, he crawled up that carefully, pausing, whenever he was sure of his hold, to listen for Taron Ling. But he reached smooth, level rock without overtaking the man. Then he stood up and reached out his arms in all directions, touching nothing.

There was no sound. He went forward, feeling his way with the riding-whip. Within a minute he had lost sense of direction. Forward, backward, it was all the same fathomless, dark silence. Then he saw the monster coming toward him—the same green-eyed head and belly on eight writhing arms that had approached him in front of the tent. If it had been real—if he had thought it was real, he could have faced it with less horror. He groped for his matches, and struck one. The thing vanished. Taron Ling stood grinning at him, ten feet away.

The match gave him a glimpse of cavern walls before it burned out and Taron Ling spoke.

"You are helpless!"

"Am I?" He charged, striking out with his whip. He struck air twice, and with the third blow struck home, following that with his left fist. Then he felt himself clutched in frenzied fingers, so he kicked Taron Ling's heel out from under him. They fell together, and he heard Taron Ling's head strike the rock floor; then the clutch of his fingers relaxed and he lay still.

Another match. There was blood on the rock. Taron Ling lay dead, with a broken skull, with one eye open. Six matches left. Silence. Dreadful darkness. Then a fluttering blow in the face. It stank. A bat had struck him.

How do the bats get out of here? he wondered.

He wiped the smell of the bat off his face and then stepped out with both hands stretched in front of him until he found the cavern wall. He felt he had slain a monster, not a human being. But what next, alone in all that darkness?

WHEN he had found the cavern wall by groping, Blair counted his remaining matches. Six. He struck one. He could not afford enough light to search Taron Ling's clothing. The match revealed two dark openings, almost opposite each other. He had completely lost sense of direction; in the struggle Taron Ling had fallen sideways, not backwards, so that the position of his body afforded no clue. He chose the wrong direction and nearly fell down the ramp up which he had scrambled five minutes before. That increased his state of panic, but he found the wall again and felt his way along it to the other opening, reserving his remaining matches for emergency. It was absolutely pitch-dark. He could see nothing—not even his hand before his eyes. There was not even an audible echo until he groped his way out of the cavern and into the tunnel. Then the echo of his footfall began to rumble along ahead of him, as if the tunnel were crowded with hurrying men.

Whistling is one of the ways by which a man can recover his self-control. He tried it, and his first effort was merely a whisper, because his lips were dry. The whisper made a sound in the tunnel like a soft wind. That suggested another thought. He wetted one finger as well as his lips, and held up the finger. There was a perceptible, although very slight cur-

The golden objects were as weirdly shaped as the most fantastic designs of a Futurist sculptor.

rent of air. There must be an opening somewhere. His second attempt to whistle was shrill and off-key; the sound went shrieking an immeasureable distance, that might be miles or might be an illusion due to the formation of the tunnel, the state of his own nerves, and the darkness.

As the hollow shriek faded and died, it resembled a murmur of human voices very far off. It occurred to him then for the first time that very likely there were other people in the caverns. If so, they must certainly have heard him. Taron Ling's behavior was explainable on that supposition. It was incredible that he could have set his trap so well without some organized assistance. He had boasted that the watchers, whom Blair had mistaken for the commissioner's or Howland's undercover men, were Wu Tu's agents; and that was conceivably true. If so, others of Wu Tu's agents might be waiting at a rendezvous for Taron Ling and perhaps also for himself, for some reason not yet evident.

Assuming that to be true, Taron Ling's motive could be guessed at. Both he and Wu Tu had used hypnotic methods. Taron Ling had used a kind of third degree, to create a mental condition quite familiar to psychologists, in which the victim does what he is told. He had then demanded obedience to himself, in place of Wu Tu. She, in Bombay, also had insisted on obedience.

That might even mean, although it was improbable almost to the point of impossibility, that Wu Tu herself was somewhere in the caverns, and that she and Taron Ling were false allies, at secret cross-purposes. Anyhow, more than probably there was a very definite reason why Taron Ling had behaved as he did. Presumably he, Blair Warrender, in some way was important in the schemes of a number of people, who might be expecting him. In the circumstances that was an encouraging thought, and he whistled again, then shouted, *"Koi hai?"*

The shout went thundering along the tunnel like the voice of a multitude, until the words lost shape and died away at last in a hollow murmur—oi-ai—oi-ai—oi-ai. There was no answer. He waited until the ensuing silence became as terrifying as the darkness and he knew he must go forward or lose all command of himself. The echo of his first footstep made him jump nearly out of skin. He knew then exactly how third-degree witnesses feel. He craved even Taron Ling's company.

He spread his arms on the invisible wall and pressed his whole body against it because he felt there was a precipice behind him, although he knew there was not. He drove his toes against the wall, as if he stood on a narrow ledge with his heels on nothing. Frantically he fought against thought, fearing he might begin to see things in the dark and go mad.

But the thought of Henrietta intruded, insisted and won. Where was Henrietta? Had they brought her to these caverns? If so was she enduring this silent darkness? Could he find her? He *must* find her. There was no other picture than Henrietta in his mind after that—Henrietta on the rock in moonlight—Henrietta in Bombay amid the colored garden-party lanterns—Henrietta at Ganesha's shrine, garlanded amid the shadows, watching a mad hermit bless a tiger-skin—Henrietta with hands over her eyes (but he could see the eyes through the hands) in the chair in front of his tent—

He did not think of himself any more. He thought only of her. Gradually the terror loosened its grip. It left him feeling weak-kneed but in command of his senses. He began to move forward very slowly, groping his way along the wall with his left hand, almost feeling he was not alone, because the picture of Henrietta in his thought was so clear and persistent. There was a weird, exciting, nervous but not too terrible sensation of following Henrietta into the heart of a mystery. The echoes of his own footsteps almost made him think he heard her. He remembered speculations such as all men make at one time or another. Death, and groping one's way into life after death, might be like this.

But he stopped after fifty or sixty careful paces and leaned on the wall again. That mental image of Henrietta was becoming too real. He was beginning to imagine himself dead and in the next world. He was losing his mind. So he stood perfectly still, hardly breathing, to let the echoes die away in silence.

He tried to force himself to think. Here he was, a policeman, with a definite job, in a bad predicament. What was the sane thing to do? Go back? Climb those steps and try to move Ganesha's image from beneath? He could not imagine himself doing it; nor could he drive the picture of Henrietta from his mind. She was somewhere on ahead of him. She must be. Without knowledge or reason he knew that, and felt an irresistible impulse to go forward and find her.

THOSE last echoes were a long time dying. They appeared even to grow stronger. There was something added to them—something with a slap in it that, he knew afterward, should have instantly informed him. It was probably more than a minute—an eternity foreshortened—before he suspected the sound

of feet in loose slippers approaching. He nearly froze then, into immobility.

When he forced himself to move, his hand trembled so that he could hardly get a match out of the box. However, he struck one at last. It gave him a glimpse of a tunnel that seemed partly natural and partly hewn through onyx or some similar formation. The sound of the approaching footsteps ceased before the match went out. He stood still, listening, with the picture of the weirdly colored tunnel gradually fading from his eyes.

He could hear nothing. But after a minute, or perhaps two minutes, dim light crept toward him along the left-hand wall of the tunnel, at a point some distance off, where it curved to the right and sloped upward. The light was not quite steady. He felt reasonably sure it came from an electric torch in someone's hand. It grew no stronger, and moved no farther along the tunnel wall; and because of the curve of the wall it left a diagonal zone of total darkness. It might be possible to creep along that dark zone unseen, and to peer around the curve before showing himself. He decided to make the attempt.

But his nerves were in no shape for still hunting; it was very difficult to move without making a noise. He tried to move on tiptoe, but his sinews trembled. At the first sound he made, the light was switched off suddenly. He made a dash for it then, awakening a thousand booming echoes and reaching the opposite wall while the distance to the right-hand curve was still sharply impressed on his mind.

By groping his way along the wall he reached the bulge of the curve almost before the picture of it had faded from his eyes. There he waited, hardly breathing, flattened against the wall; and after a long wait the light came on again. There was a perceptible sound; he thought he recognized the faint click of the switch of an electric torch. But it might be a trigger.

He lay down then, as close to the wall as he could crowd himself, and very gradually crawled until he could see around the corner. Someone was holding a powerful light at the top of a long slope. He appeared to be sitting and holding the light on his knees to keep it steady. Not improbably he had a firearm in the other hand, but it was impossible to see beyond the light; it had a big lens and might be electric, or even an acetylene bicycle lamp. It revealed the floor and walls of the sharply rising tunnel in minute detail, including a huge zigzag shadow that crossed the floor from side to side and seemed to indicate a chasm. It looked like a split caused by an earthquake.

He memorized its position carefully, estimating the number of steps he should take to reach it. He judged there would be a jump of about for or five feet to be made, up-hill, at the narrowest part of the chasm near where it touched and split the right-hand wall. It would be a desperate jump to have to take if the man should switch the light off.

"Koi hai?" he shouted, and then hugged the floor, pressed flat, half expecting a bullet.

He could not catch a word of the answer because it was all confused by echoes. He could not even tell what language it was spoken in, although it was certainly not English. It was a short answer—six or eight words. Then the light was switched off, and when it reappeared it had grown dim in the distance.

He got to his feet in a hurry; he could no longer see the chasm in the middle of the upward slope of the tunnel floor; there was merely an unsteady pale light up above and beyond, to show that someone who carried the light was moving away rapidly. If he was expected to follow, there was no time to waste.

He started to climb up the slope on his hands and knees. It was quite dark when he reached the chasm; he had to feel for it. Groping for the far edge with his riding-whip he discovered that the gap was wider than he had estimated. He could just touch the edge with the end of the whip, and it was three or three-and-a-half feet higher than the place where he must jump off. Measuring again and feeling about in the dark for a narrower place, he dropped the riding-whip. It seemed like an eternity before the echo of its fall came cracking upward, and the very echo seemed to stink of death.

To hesitate then would be fatal, he knew that. Thirst was beginning to torture him, and he knew his nerve would give way if he gave it half an opportunity. He set both feet on the brink of the chasm and sprang so violently that his feet slipped backward, reducing the impetus. He fell waist high on the upper ledge with his fingers scrambling madly at smooth rock and his legs dangling in the chasm. He could touch nothing with his feet; they seemed to weigh a ton apiece and to be dragging him downward, but his fingers found a crack in the rock and he held on.

Little by little he worked himself upward until he lay panting with his feet on solid rock. He lay there until pain in his fingers, knees and elbows grew more acute than the imagination of the danger he had just escaped. He had broken nothing but he was skinned and bruised. He crawled on upward, rising to his feet before he reached the summit, because near the top of the slope he could

see the light again, very dim in the distance.

It occurred to him then to wait there and see what happened. But the suffocating heat, emotion, and his own efforts had dried his mouth and throat until the thirst was almost unendurable. Like all men who have had previous experience of thirst, he dreaded that more than any other form of torment.

He caught himself wondering what he would pay for a drink—to what extent he would betray himself, his friends and his principles in order to get one. Had he any principles? He would sell his soul for a drink, and no bones about it. Could a man sell his own soul under torture? Would the bargain hold? He would have to find that out. And Henrietta? Damn all intuition! What had the commissioner called it—eyewashed lazy thinking! He had pursued a mirage of Henrietta.

He was glad it was a mirage. He did not wish to find her—not now. Why not? Because what damned right had she to see him in this condition? She was only entitled to see him as he chose to show himself—Blair Warrender, determined, resolute, secretive, captain of his soul and master of his fate within the limits imposed by the Indian Penal Code, his oath of service and the various acts and decrees of the viceroy in council.

He would much rather parade himself naked in the Byculla Club and take the consequences than let Henrietta see him lacking in self-control. Why? Damned if he knew why. Forward—feeling slightly better, more angry, less bewildered, very angry indeed with Henrietta. Damn her, why couldn't she have told him what she knew, or what she guessed, when he gave her the opportunity?

Chapter Eight

> Ye who are proudly intellectual declare with scorn that there is no such thing as sorcery. Like bell-wethers, that again and again unharmed have smelt and seen the shambles, ye mislead multitudes. On your heads be it, ye who know so much, yet know not how, for instance, courteous and kindly men are maddened to make war on one another; or how panic is imposed upon the bold and generous. Ye admit ye know not. Chemistry and electricity were sorcery aforetime. Was sorcery then in those days nothing, until a few inquired into the secrets, and then many learned and it became not sorcery? Is whatever ye know not, therefore nothing? Superstition is fear of unknown forces. Sorcery is the use of unknown forces. Unknown forces are the means by which a few deceive a multitude; and ye proud mockers of the ignorant, who say that sorcery is nothing, ye were better busied seeking what it is, instead of lazily neglecting to destroy that veil of ignorance behind which sorcerers, I tell you, labor vigilantly.
>
> —From the Second of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

BLAIR'S EYES began to grow accustomed to the dimness as he followed the man with the light, not attempting to overtake him. He did try to shout to him once, but his parched throat made only unintelligible sounds and it seemed stupid to repeat the effort, much wiser to reserve his remaining energy. His thirst was increased by a weird sensation of being under water at great depth. His clothes and riding-boots felt like a heavy diving-suit. There should be no sound under water, but the hollow echoes somehow or other increased the suggestion. Bats, occasionally glimpsed, were like swift fish swimming.

The tunnel wound like a snake. It was certainly hewn out and widened in places, but it appeared to follow what originally was a watercourse in the heart of the mountain, although there was not a trace of dampness. There began to be a lot of stalagmite formation that took fantastic shapes like the faces of monstrous men and animals. The floor of the tunnel was filthy with bats' excreta. The dust was stifling; it made breathing difficult. The dust kicked up by the man ahead hung suspended in air, and the light appeared through that as dim as moonlight on the sea floor.

He had lost all sense of time, distance and direction when the light at last began to grow stronger. It was still dim with dust, but more golden and suggested daylight. Presently he felt fresher air on his face. That revived him a little, although the air was dry and hot and if anything it increased his thirst. There was such a singing in his ears that he could hardly hear his own footsteps.

When he stood still for a moment he could hear nothing ahead of him in the tunnel. When he went on again he discovered the tunnel made two sharp turns, which might account for his not hearing the other man's footsteps. The second turn brought him face to face with brilliant sunlight that poured through a huge fanged break in the mountain wall, like a monster's mouth, two or three hundred feet away and fifty feet above him.

Dazzled by the glimpse of blue sky, he could see almost nothing else for a moment. There was a big boulder almost blocking the mouth of the tunnel; he stood in the shadow of that

and leaned against it, protecting his eyes with both hands. The fierce light looked liquid where it met the floor—a layer of liquid silver on soot-black ink. Dust particles in the air increased the suggestion of sediment formed on the floor of a pond. After a while he traced a winding track across the soot-black floor; it led from the tunnel out of which he had come, toward what looked like blackened masonry on the far side. The track had evidently been made by human footsteps. But why did it curve?

Some of the blackness changed to ash-gray as he stared at it. He began to be able to see the discolored walls of a cavern. Soon after that he discovered that his hands were blackened by something resembling soot. So was his clothing. The walls of the cavern took shadowy shape, and though he could not see the roof he could guess at the size of the place. It was not enormous—perhaps sixty or seventy feet long by a hundred wide. Something hung from the roof; apparently it was a blackened chain, with rust-red showing through a covering of soot; it suggested a trapdoor up there, or at any rate some kind of opening.

Almost suddenly it occurred to him that he might be beneath the keep of Gaglajung. This might be the place where munitions—more probably firewood—had been stored. Such a fortress would need enormous quantities of fuel in case of siege. If the legend were true; if Ranjeet's consort actually had immolated herself and her women rather than surrender the place, what easier way had she than to set fire to the store of fuel? That would have served a double purpose by preventing the three kings from forcing an entrance through the secret tunnel, supposing it were true that Ranjeet under torture had betrayed its secret.

THERE were signs everywhere of the effects of tremendous heat. He took the winding track across the floor and his feet fell in almost silence on a thick carpet of charcoal and ashes. He discovered then why the track was not straight; it avoided lumps of blackened wood, and other things. There was a skull, for instance, as black as charcoal, grinning upward with blackened teeth. It was a small skull and might be a woman's. There were blackened rib-bones. He detected about half of a human spine. In another place a forearm and part of a hand, as black as ebony, lay on something that looked like a half-burned stump of a sawn tree.

Stepping incautiously as he stared about him, he trod on a thigh-bone that cracked and crumbled into dust. Acrid ash-dust rose from beneath his feet, however carefully he walked. It nearly choked him. He was half blinded by it before he reached the far side, but he could see that the discolored masonry had cracked as the result of fire; enough of it had fallen to leave a gap through which it was easy to pass without touching the sides. Until he approached it closely the gap looked like a fluke of sunlight on the blackened wall. Actually light shone through the gap. There was a sensation as of someone lurking in wait on the far side. But by that time he would have plunged through fire in the hope of finding water anywhere beyond it.

He had passed a whole night without sleep. He had killed a man in gruesome circumstances and had suffered horrors of imagination. But his ravening thirst was worse than all that. If he had known for a fact that ten men lurked in ambush, and that they intended to tear him in pieces, he would nevertheless have gone forward.

He stepped through and found himself in what was once a rock-hewn temple naturally formed of stalactite and stalagmite, some of which had been fantastically carved into semi-human shapes. The place was quite small. At the far end was a huge lingam on an altar of stalagmite. Beside that was a wide doorway with remains of the decayed woodwork still wedged into slots in the smooth rock wall. Almost staggeringly unexpected, stock-still in the doorway, waiting for him, staring at him, stood Zaman Ali, in a thin cotton shirt, with a knife at his waist. His face was filthy with sweat-streaked soot. He had a revolver in one hand, and in the other he carried an engineer's electric lantern that had an enormous lens. He flashed the light on, full in Blair's face.

"So you come alone!" he said in Pushtu, rather indistinctly. He, too, had dust in a dry throat. "Mashallah, this world is full of wonders! Allah's will be done—but have you robbed me of the chance to be the agent of it? Where is Taron Ling?"

Blair could not have forced himself to speak intelligibly. His throat was burning. But he would not have answered in any event. He was actually less conscious of thirst now that he had a concrete enemy to tackle. There was not much risk of Zaman Ali using the revolver—not if Zaman Ali, as seemed certain, wanted him there in the heart of a mountain alive, for some purpose or other. He craved water. Undoubtedly Zaman Ali knew where water could be found, and that was the first problem, but it might not be wise to let the Afghan know how serious it was. He tried to close his lips, breathe calmly and look like a man with information and resources in reserve as he strode toward him.

Zaman Ali laughed. It was a snarl and a sneer combined, but there was humor in it—cruel humor that anticipated triumph. "There are streams of cool water," he said, "in paradise. So it is written. There is water of secret springs in this grave of devils. Thirst is stronger than devils. It is stronger than fear or wisdom."

He stood aside. Through the wide doorway at his back came three of the men whom Blair had seen at Wu Tu's in Bombay. One was the owner of the brown-and-white shoes and the blackjack, who had looked absurd in striped socks. He was wearing the shoes now; they were filthy and so was his shirt. He was wild-eyed with excitement.

"Have you a weapon?" he asked in English, snapping the words out, peering into Blair's face. "No," he said over his shoulder, "he has no weapon." Then he produced the little blackjack from inside his shirt. He slapped it on the palm of his left hand. "I have this," he said, showing his teeth. "You are acquainted with its efficacy. Are you thirsty?" He slapped the weapon on his hand a second time. "If you are already very thirsty, that is a simplification. We had thought we might be forced to wait until tomorrow. There is no water exactly here. Do you want any? I could get it."

"Where is Taron Ling?" repeated Zaman Ali.

Blair stood silent. The man with the blackjack was of a perfectly familiar type. He was capable of any cruelty; equally incapable of sympathy or real courage. There was nothing on earth to be gained by arguing with him. He was within reach. It might have been possible to knock him out with a sudden hook to the jaw, or to trip and fall on him; but to attempt to do either, and fail, was to invite intelligent but bestial revenge. Zaman Ali was the only real man in sight. A rogue, yes. A ruthless, sly, not improbably treacherous, and certainly shameless scoundrel. But a man. Well hidden, but discoverable somewhere in his character were principles for which Zaman Ali would be willing to die in his boots. All the others were human jackals. Blair strode up to Zaman Ali and the Afghan understood that perfectly. He nodded.

"Aye," he said, "this is an issue between thee and me." He turned fiercely on the others and ordered them back whence they came, using scurrilous words that, where he came from, would have set Death on tiptoe for the harvest. But he had a revolver and they had none. They retreated grinning, as if it were a good joke to hear their mothers' memory reviled. Then Zaman Ali shrugged his shoulders, with a sour look at the lingam on the ancient altar:

"Curses on such a religion!" he muttered. Then, more loudly, "But there is a secret here worth plucking forth. I have sold drink dear in my day, but by God, Blair Warrender, today's price is the highest!"

Somewhere beyond the doorway, someone began pouring water from one vessel into another. It splashed delightfully.

"And there is salt," said Zaman Ali. "I have seen more than one man, trussed within sight and sound of water, given salt to eat. If I remember rightly, it was not too long before they chose between alternatives. There is the other Salt, of the oath one man makes to another. Choose thou between them, Blair Warrender!"

THE Afghan kept well out of arm's reach. The sight of knife and revolver was unlikely to restrain a man whom thirst had maddened, but Blair was not nearly maddened yet, and the Afghan knew it. He evidently did not wish to use his weapons; he wished to bargain. The splashing of water implied that his men were listening for a cue to rush in and very swiftly stop any fight that Blair might offer. Whatever Zaman Ali's motive might be, he evidently wanted Blair alive and uninjured for some definite purpose. But Blair had a good excuse for not trying to speak, and he made the most of it. He waited in silence for Zaman Ali to unmask motive. Zaman Ali stared into his smouldering eyes:

"Perhaps you have the heart to die of thirst," he said after a long pause. "But by my beard I see no sense in it." He laughed curtly. "I have seen obstinate men die of torture." The windy look came into his eyes, as if he stared at a hard horizon. "Allah only knows what gain they won of that. Die, if you like, Blair Warrender. I have the giving of death; I will give without flinching. Thou and I, it may be, are two of one wilfulness. But in the matter of a choice between betrayals, only Allah, who knoweth all things, knows what a tortured man will choose."

He switched the light off. Dim daylight, through the openings at either end of the little temple, created gloom amid which the carved stalactite monsters on the walls grinned like gray ideas half-visioned in a waking dream. The splashing of water increased perceptibly. The sooty sweat on Zaman Ali's face exaggerated the seams of savagery, and the pupils of his eyes grew large but lost no hardness.

"Do you understand," he said, "that you were driven hither, as they drove that tiger to your gun in the night? That was a long task and expensive. God be my witness, I was against employing Taron Ling. But Wu Tu took the bit in her teeth and was worse to

manage than a mad mare. *I* would have put the torture to you there in Bombay, but Wu Tu would have none of it; and by Allah, having some experience of women, and of Wu Tu, I perceived there was more than one blade to the knife of her argument. So I used your pass and Chetusingh's to draw the police off my trail; and I came hither.

"*Your* trail—Wu Tu was right about that—was as easy to foretell as a colt's when the mares are up-wind, seeing how Wu Tu had forced an issue by sending to the papers news that Frennisham is missing. There was none except you likely to be sent to question Frennisham's daughter. None other can bridle that filly, unless—"

He paused. He appeared to wish to feel out prejudices and to find a compromise between them. He was telling too much, for a man who felt he held the whiphand. Blair gave him no help—waited—watched—betrayed no curiosity. But he perfectly understood that Zaman Ali meant to go the limit if argument failed. There was a stiff proposition coming. The alternative to torture was likely to be nothing easy. He began to see Wu Tu's eyes again, and that worried him because it might mean he was losing self-control. His only imaginable chance was that delay might bring some of the commissioner's or Howland's men to the rescue. But Zaman Ali guessed that thought was in his mind.

"The police hunt for me in Calcutta," he said. "They who followed this trail have been dealt with. They are dead. Die thou of thirst here, and none will know it. But such a death will serve what purpose? Allah! I would rather watch thee dying than see the woman in the same case! Be that on your head! The sahiba's torment shall begin where yours ends! Some men say that women are less than dogs; but I am not of that number. I say wo- vary; and it may be one of them now and again is worth a man's life and everything else that he has."

The water splashed again. Zaman Ali strode to the doorway and someone put a brass goblet of water into his outstretched hand. He swilled out his mouth, drank deep, shook the remaining drops on the dry floor, returned the empty goblet and again faced Blair.

"Henrietta Frennisham sahiba," he said slowly, "is at your mercy—if you have any. As for me, I have none, excepting at a high price."

Blair took a step backward and leaned against the ancient altar, partly because his face was then in deeper shadow; but he also knew he needed physical support if he was not to show how scared he felt. If it was true that Henrietta was in danger of being tortured, he could not help her, himself or anyone by choosing death first rather than yield to the Afghan's demands. But it was not yet time to admit that. The thirst that he already felt was sufficiently fierce to tax will power, and he knew from previous experience that it was nothing compared to what was coming unless he could get water soon. He might have the strength to endure it and die. But could he leave her to that fate?

"There is a secret here," said Zaman Ali, "and she has it. If she has not, she can get it. If she will not, she will die. It is thy task, Bee-lair Warrender, to break that filly to the rein and get the secret. Do it, and both of you have my leave to live. Fail, and you die. By Allah, that is the whole story."

He came closer and stood watching Blair's face. Then he went to the doorway, demanded water, spilled half of the contents of the little goblet on the floor and offered the rest to Blair.

"Drink," he said. "Then answer. That is your last drink, until you and I agree together."

Blair moistened his mouth. Then he drank and set the empty goblet on the altar beside the lingam.

"Where is Taron Ling?" Zaman Ali demanded. It was the third time he had asked that question. Blair decided not to answer it.

"Wait and see," he said, testing his voice. It was very important to speak calmly if he possibly could. Nothing tells in the East more strongly in a man's favor than a level voice in poignant circumstances. Nothing gives a man better command of himself. His voice came hoarsely from his throat, but it still had some quality.

ZAMAN ALI'S eyes glanced anxiously at the gap in the broken masonry. He seemed afraid Taron Ling might enter. His hand closed tight on his revolver butt. He even stepped to the gap, peered through and paused to listen. Then he returned and stared at Blair's eyes.

"Did you make a bargain with him?" he demanded.

Blair clung to his resolution not to answer. The Afghan's fear was probably more deadly than his greed, but there was a long chance, perhaps one in a thousand, that fear of Taron Ling might make him easier to manage.

"You—and that dog of a devil—agreed on—what?" Zaman Ali demanded.

"No matter what."

That was Wu Tu's voice—unmistakably hers. Something moved in the gloom behind Zaman Ali and the voice continued, "Trust an

Afghan to flinch from a dugpa! Out of the way and let me handle him!" She was half-invisible against the stalagmite behind her. She peered through the folds of a sari that shrouded her head and shoulders, looking unexpectedly small beside Zaman Ali's bulk—small, frail, vital. Her eyes were a determined devil's. She kept out of Blair's reach. "Who cares what Taron Ling did? Watch what I do! If he disobeys me, tie him and bring the salt." She advanced a step closer. "Are you willing to obey me?"

Blair's eyes smoldered and grew calm again. It was useless to defy her openly. Zaman Ali and his men could overwhelm him in a moment, and Wu Tu would have less compunction than a tigress. But could he deceive her? He avoided her stare for a moment and then met it suddenly, as if trying to read her mind. His own was made up.

"I made you an offer," she said, "in Bombay. I repeat it for the last time. To the top of the tree—power—all you wish!—if you obey me. Otherwise—"

Why, if she had such secret power, did she need a mere policeman's will in submission to hers? He was no such fool as to believe she was in love with him, but she was doing tricks with her eyes now, making them look seductive—feline-fierce and feline-amorous, darkly purposeful and moody with anticipation. Zaman Ali clucked a disapproving tongue against his teeth. He disliked any sort of magic, even for his own ends. But he was either afraid of Wu Tu or else he feared to oppose her for some other reason.

"In the name of the Nine-and-Ninety Names of the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth and all that is," he muttered.

Wu Tu, shrouded in thin silk drapery, came one step nearer, radiating perfume. "You surrender?"

There was a long pause, and then:

"Yes," Blair answered. He felt better and knew he had acted wisely the moment he said it. It was mental ju-jitsu. The difficulty, now, would be to act that spoken lie and not to disillusion her too soon. The triumph in her eyes betrayed her. Zaman Ali muttered his doubt half-audibly. But she, in the heart of her vain heart, believed her hypnotic will had won.

"No, no, no drink for him yet!" said Wu Tu.

He of the blackjack had hurried in with a big brass jar of water, seeking to ingratiate himself by being first with it, believing Blair's star was now in the ascendant. Blair made a mental note of the man's craving to be important. Rebuked, he pretended he had only come to add to Blair's discomfort. He splashed water on the floor and grinned spitefully. Zaman Ali drove him out, cursing his mother's religion in terms of concrete imagery.

Wu Tu promptly dismissed Zaman Ali, who resented it. He had no use for being ordered to and fro by women, and he also resented having had Blair snatched, as it were, from the fangs of his own intention. After a muttered altercation the Afghan swaggered out, slapping his slippers on the smooth stone as a sort of obligato to scurrilous thought. Outside, he kicked someone; there was an explosion of savage oaths followed by the snarl of a fight that died unborn. In spite of thirst and exhaustion Blair began to feel decidedly less discouraged. There was a rift in the enemy's ranks, but he masked his awareness of that.

Wu Tu stood more than the length of a stride away, confident but careful. The suffocating heat provided a good excuse to throw open the dark silk saris that shrouded her figure. Beneath those was a mere film of gauzy material, that shone like opal. It limned her figure. She was almost naked. She shook the sari from her coiled, dark hair and, possibly because the light was dim and from two directions, she looked suddenly young, but curiously Chinese. Her perfume suggested lavender, but it was something much more subtly exciting; it stirred imagination.

"And now," she said, "we befriend each other? Eh, Blair?"

He nodded. "You hold all the high cards."

"But you are treacherous! You intend to learn my secret—afterwards to see me at the devil—is it not so? Eh, Blair?"

HE SUSPECTED he was in the deadliest danger he had ever been in. He did not know yet what the danger was, but he did know he had to deceive her and to gain her confidence by some means. Her accurate reading of his thought might not be entirely guesswork. She intended to control him. That was obvious. She certainly believed she had hypnotized him in her house in Bombay, and to a limited extent she was right; he had been unable to banish the mental image of her eyes.

That trick was nothing wonderful. It was not nearly as wonderful as Taron Ling's. It was as easy to explain as ineradicable memories of scenes glimpsed in an explosion and photographed on the brain. But it might be a key to a system of thought-reading; and if so, it should work both ways. If she could read his thought by that means, or in consequence of that, then perhaps he could read hers. He deliberately recalled that vision of her eyes that had been so persistent. It was quite easy; he could see them without looking away from her. At once he thought he knew what she intended.

His eyes searched her loosened sari. In one of its folds he saw the handle of a little dagger that resembled the one he had taken away from her in Bombay. It might even be the same dagger.

Nothing is swifter than thought. Not for nothing did her name in Chinese mean Five Poisons. There crossed his mind a memory of certain wasps. They capture insects, sting them, paralyze them, and devour them later. It was a blood-curdling thought. That might not, after all, have been alcohol within the blade of Wu Tu's little dagger that night in Bombay. He had guessed it was alcohol, and he had told the commissioner it was, but he might have been wrong.

He had heard—who has not?—of eastern poisons that are said to paralyze a victim's will but leave him otherwise in full possession of his senses. Everything has its opposite. Curare is a well known drug that paralyzes the motor centers, but leaves brain and nerves intensely sensitive. If Wu Tu shou'd possess a drug that was the opposite of that

He decided to possess that dagger and he took a stride toward her, smiling. He remembered the name she had asked him to use. But his mouth was dry again. He found words difficult.

"Let's forget what a bloody fool I was that night, Marie. I've thought it over. I'll play."

"Yes," she answered. But she avoided his arms. She stepped back very quickly into shadow. When he followed her, he saw that Zaman Ali and three other men could now see him through the doorway. He was between two lights, whereas she was in opal gloom. He had missed.

Had she read his intention? Probably. But she disguised her motive:

"No, no, not now! You are filthy. Your face is sooty and dusty. Besides—no, not in this place!"

She moved like a leopard. Perfume passed between him and the monstrously figured wall. He hardly saw her until she beckoned to him from beside Zaman Ali. Far beyond her, at the end of a tunnel, daylight poured in a golden cascade, apparently into a huge circular pit: but that strong light and the weirdly colored gloom this side of it were so baffling that he could make out very little except her figure.

He strode through the opening toward her, but turned aside suddenly and made for the brass water-jar. The owner of the blackjack crouched beside it. At a sign from Wu Tu he upset it and the water became mud on the dusty floor. With almost the greatest effort of self-control he had exerted yet, Blair refrained from kicking him. The man's capacity for treachery might prove valuable later on, and meanwhile he was not worth kicking.

"Give him the other," Wu Tu commanded.

He who had spilled the water produced a flask labelled *Fine Cognac* and unscrewed the stopper. Zaman Ali grumbled:

"Wah! Wah! Do you want him frenzied? What if he has made terms with Taron Ling?"

Blair accepted the flask. With his mind on Zaman Ali but his eyes on Wu Tu, he poured the contents on the rock floor, where they mingled with the mud. The stuff looked like cognac, but its smell was not quite familiar, or he thought not.

"Damn you," he said to Wu Tu. "Zaman Ali plays a straight game. Yours is feline treachery."

He seized the water-jar. There were a few drops unspilled. He drank. He could not see around the big jar while he held it to his mouth but no one took advantage of his being offguard for a moment.

"I say, risk it as he is," Zaman Ali grumbled. "He may be better as he is. If Taron Ling has taught him anything—"

"Leave him to me," Wu Tu retorted.

The Afghan clucked impatience: "To you! To you! He is a man, this fellow. He and I can understand each other. What did you do to the other? Spoiled him! Now spoil this one? Then what?"

VAGUE though it was, that might be a hint of Chetusingh's fate. Spoiled him? What did that mean? Torture? Blair set down the water-jar and stared at Wu Tu. She was muttering at Zaman Ali, looking angrier than he had seen a human being. It was cold, malignant, calculating anger. He watched her right hand steal into the folds of her sari. Suddenly she struck with the speed of a snake at the Afghan's liver. He shrieked—fear, agony, hatred—a yell that wailed along the tunnel. Instinct made him try to draw his own knife instead of using the revolver, but the owner of the blackjack struck him a terrific blow on the back of the head. In a spasm he fired the revolver as he fell, and missed Wu Tu by the width of the film of light that edged her bare neck. Blair was swift then. He possessed that revolver before the echo of the shot had rattled into silence. He made a dive for it. Wu Tu's knife was in the Afghan's liver. She was helpless to do anything but gasp excitedly.

The blackjack's owner swung for the back of Blair's head. Two other men rushed him. He dodged them all, kicked the revolver, dribbled it along the tunnel for a few yards and picked it up before they could overtake him. He had no need to threaten them then; they backed away, watching him like cats as he

stood, now, with his back to the strong light.

He examined the weapon.. Its six chambers contained five cartridges, and of those, four had been used. Perhaps Wu Tu already knew that, but there was no need to inform her if she did not know. The obvious next thing to do was to search Zaman Ali's body for cartridges; but Wu Tu had already recovered her thin-bladed dagger and was first at the spoils. She knelt beside the Afghan, listening to him, watching, glancing once or twice at Blair but seeming undisturbed by the fact that he now had a weapon. She searched the Afghan's clothing diligently while he stared at her with glazed eyes—groaned, gasped, made sounds that perhaps he thought were words. Apparently Wu Tu failed to find what she looked for. She glanced at Blair again and seemed about to speak. As her lips moved Zaman Ali died in a spasm of agony.

There was a sound, and Blair faced about suddenly. Behind him—close to him—almost within reach—in shoes soled with thick felt—was the Chinese girl who had opened the door at the head of the stairs in the house in Bombay. He turned just in time to see the cigarette in its long tube return to her lips. It was a half finished cigarette and there was ash on the end. Her eyes were inscrutable, her face expressionless, but he was almost sure he had seen her right hand move; four fingers of it were now in the blue-and-daffodil pyjama jacket pocket, with the long-nailed thumb outside. She looked too innocent. She made as if to pass him without a greeting.

He stood back against the wall as if to let her pass, but the moment she moved he stepped forward again, seized her left arm that was nearest to him—the one that held the cigarette. She tried to strike then, with a weapon exactly like Wu Tu's. But its blade passed through the bottom of the pocket inside her pyjamas. Its handle caught the pocket lining. It came out awkwardly. She missed. Before she could stab a second time she was on her back on the ground, Blair's foot was on the dagger and there was a little stream of liquid oozing from its broken blade.

Then, for a fraction of a second, Wu Tu betrayed nervousness. She glanced about her swiftly and her own right hand crept to the folds of her sari. But there was Blair's revolver, and her eyes considered that. There were three men between her and Blair; she seemed to doubt them more than him. They were Zaman Ali's followers. True, one of them had blackjacked Zaman Ali, but her glance showed how little she trusted him. She rose slowly from her knees, and age seemed to have stolen a march on her; but she overcame that in a moment, and when she smiled the telltale years had already vanished like a shadow that had passed over a young face.

"You and I befriend each other, eh, Blair? Let that girl up. What did you do with Taron Ling?"

"You will find out," he answered. "Where's Henrietta Frensham?"

The Chinese girl tried to wrench the broken dagger from under his foot. Failing to do it, she crawled away from him, then rose to her feet and walked toward Wu Tu with perfectly assumed indifference. She had not lost her cigarette tube; she stuck in a fresh cigarette and lighted it, very slowly walking past the owner of the blackjack, answering his leer with a stare that made him change it into a grin like a starved wolf's; he glanced from her to Blair and back again.

Wu Tu gave her little dagger to the Chinese girl, who wiped it carefully on Zaman Ali's turban. Wu Tu took it back without glancing at it and hid it away in a fold of her sari.

"Now you and I can be really friendly! Are you thirsty? You shall drink now. There is no need any longer to defer to a dog of an Afghan."

Her slipper came off as she kicked dead Zaman Ali. The Chinese girl returned it to her.

Chapter Nine

The test of strength is silence. Remember: I said strength, not goodness. I know not the measure of goodness. But the strong love silence, in which the weak reveal weakness by clamor and boast and lament. The test of character is mystery. Integrity, in presence of a mystery, awaits imagination's touch that, like the dawn upon the darkness, solves night's riddle. But the vain revile all mystery. And why not? For it challenges their vanity, that might lie longer hidden if it could endure the strain of silence in the presence of truth dimly seen but not yet known or understood.

—From the First of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

BLAIR walked slowly toward Wu Tu, wondering whether she or any of the others knew there was only one shot left in the revolver. Midway toward her he confronted the owner of the blackjack who stepped forward smiling. He was not obsequious, but polite; he salaamed with one hand to his forehead, holding the blackjack in the other.

"You appear to be master of the situation, sahib," he said in English.

"Quite so. Give me your weapon."

The man glanced at Wu Tu. She watched Blair.

"Shoot him," she suggested.

Two other men slunk away into the gloom where the wall projected and cast deep shadow.

Suddenly they took to their heels. They scampered like scared rats through the temple and out through the gap in the broken wall into the ash-floored cavern where the bones of burned women lay. A third man went and stood near Wu Tu. He of the blackjack hesitated.

"You should know me," he said, "I am well known to the police. I am from Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu. I am Grish Singh. I am Duri-i-Duran sahib's agent. I know all about this, I assure you. I will tell everything. But you should shoot her."

Blair kept his eyes on the man's face. He expected treachery and cobra-suddenness. He was ready for it. But if he could, he proposed to save that one bullet. He could deal with this beast with his fist if necessary.

"Did you hear me? Hand over your weapon."

Instead of obeying, the man took a step backward. Blair still hesitated to use that one remaining bullet. Grish Singh, as he called himself, began talking at top speed:

"Don't be unwise—listen to me—let me show you—Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu is my master—he will—"

Suddenly he, too, tried to bolt for it, but he did not get far. As he turned he screamed and threw up both hands. With his back toward Blair he beat at someone's brains. In that weird, mixed light it was difficult to tell what happened. That other man, who had slunk away into the gloom, had evidently taken Zaman Ali's long knife. Perhaps Wu Tu gave it to him. He had crept up from behind and used it. Grish Singh fell writhing, with blood blubbering and foaming from his mouth. The other, with blackjacked brains on his face, lay still beneath him. It was all over in a moment. Grish Singh's life sobbed out of him as he wrenched at the knife that was into him almost hilt-deep.

Wu Tu's voice came out of shadow. "So then, are they both dead? That means Dur-i-Duran Singh is out of it as well as Zaman Ali. Taron Ling next! Where is he?"

The blackjack, blood-hideous, had fallen between Blair's feet and the tunnel wall. He kicked it into a deep crack in the floor. Then he set his foot on Grish Singh's body and pulled out the long knife; he sent that after the blackjack, out of further harm's way. Wu Tu watched him; he could hardly see more than her eyes and a faint film of light on one bare shoulder. The Chinese girl was invisible.

"Come here and drop your dagger down that hole," he commanded.

Wu Tu laughed tartly. "Oh, yes! For the use, I suppose, of the other two who ran away! They will come back. They won't care to meet Taron Ling in the tunnel! They will need water, too. Don't be foolish. You have only one bullet. There was a quarrel and Zaman Ali used the others. You can't shoot more than one of us. And if you shoot me, then what?"

"Come out of that shadow," he answered.

She obeyed, but the Chinese girl remained invisible. Standing again beside Zaman Ali's body, Wu Tu showed no fear, but excitement made her weirdly beautiful. She let one loose sari fall, and she was naked enough then for her body to gleam like old ivory—a carving done by a magician's hand—motion and sensuous intelligence revealed in pure line and balanced curve.

"I will speak to you, Blair."

"Where is Henrietta Frensham?" he demanded.

"I don't know."

"Rot! You or Zaman Ali, or some of your party decoyed her to this place. Zaman Ali admitted it to me. Where is she?"

"Perhaps Zaman Ali hid her. Perhaps," she added, speaking slowly, "she needs water! You need more than water. You need me, if you will break the influence of Taron Ling! Where is he?"

She stepped toward him. The Chinese girl came out of a shadow and calmly gathered up the fallen sari. Blair made a mental note of the probability that the hidden dagger had changed owners. Standing within six feet of him, like a slave for sale, Wu Tu delivered an ultimatum:

"Blair, be as honest as I am! You don't want me, but you need me. I don't want you, but I need you! By the naked truth, I swear to be your friend. But you must swear by your honor to be my friend! You are a savage. Swear then by your honor and I will believe you! *I will give you Henrietta Frensham—I* will give her to you. She shall be yours. I am not a savage. I am cultured, so to me there is no such foolishness as honor. But I need you, and you need me, and that is naked truth, so I swear by that."

"Where's Henrietta Frensham?" he repeated.

She shrugged her shoulders, smiled, narrowing her eyes. She spoke slowly. "Taron Ling will be the one of whom to ask that, if you and I don't agree! He shall have her. Only you and I together can prevent that.

And on my terms! As for you, you will die. As for me—I gamble. What I seek is worth the gamble." She came closer to him.

"Keep your distance!"

She obeyed. "Blair, see what I will show you. After that, answer."

"I'll look. What is it?"

"Let me pass you."

He stepped back to the wall. The Chinese girl came carrying the sari and the two women walked past him toward the fierce light at the end of the tunnel, speaking Chinese to each other. The Chinese girl stooped and picked up the hilt of her broken dagger that Blair had crushed underfoot.

"Drop that!" he commanded. She looked at him over her shoulder as if he were too contemptible to deserve an answer. He was not sure she was not right. He funked the prospect of a fight with two women. He wondered whether funk, emotion, lack of sleep and thirst were combining to make him incompetent. He had found out practically nothing. He was more mystified now than ever.

HE DECIDED to follow them, chiefly because he was thirsty. He needed a drink like the devil. The few drops of water he had had were only a little better than nothing; they had made him crave more. There was maddening irritation in the dust that every footstep stirred. Wu Tu probably needed drink, too, and almost certainly knew where to get it. He was sweating and grimy; he kept imagining pools of cool water in which to plunge, drink, bathe himself. He could not imagine Wu Tu remaining personally dirty a moment longer than she could help. She was probably heading for water now—lots of it. He quickened his pace. But what he saw, a moment later, almost drove the thought of water from his mind.

The tunnel opened on a ledge that passed completely around the sheer wall of an almost oval chasm. Its sides glittered with quartz and micah. It was shaped like a womb—a retort. It narrowed upward to a curving neck, through which daylight poured like molten, white-hot metal; the light turned golden as it picked up color from the quartz on the flanks of the place.

The ledge on which he found himself was about a hundred feet above a floor that seemed covered with stuff like wax from a guttered candle, but the stuff glittered so that he could hardly see it. In the midst of that floor was a rock shaped roughly like an upturned bowl. Down toward that, from the curving roof, hung stalactites like icicles. Those were creamy, not dazzling white. Eyes rested on them with relief. The longest of them—it seemed to be forty or fifty feet long—pointed directly downward at an object that looked like crystal or flaming opal. It flashed so that eyesight refused to define it.

From the mouth of the tunnel where he stood staring, to the smooth wall on the far side, the pit was not less than three hundred feet across. Its size dwarfed that glittering thing in the midst, but the thing monopolized attention. Eyes, that could not see it beneath puckered eyelids, hardly could be forced to look away from it. It was not clear crystal; at moments it looked like frosted glass or a colossal uncut diamond. A bird flew overhead and was reflected in it. Gradually something else appeared, apparently inside the thing—something that took human shape. It looked as if a human body was encased in a cone of glass or ice. But it was too big to be a human body. When Blair moved it vanished.

There were a few birds up near the neck where the sunlight streamed in. There was such silence that their wing-beats were audible. It was a kind of cathedral silence, punctuated by another delicious sound, of dripping water. But there was no water anywhere to be seen. The stalactites were bone-dry; the water that oozed from the rock to create them had dried up centuries ago.

Wu Tu was sitting on the brink of the ledge, to the right, in comparative shadow. She was staring at that central object. The Chinese girl, beside her, stood holding Wu Tu's sari over one arm and doing something to the broken dagger-handle. It was easy to keep them in full view. There appeared to be no way out except up that unclimbable curve toward daylight or else back through the tunnel. Blair turned left, away from them, in full sunlight, shading his eyes under his left hand, stopping at every third or fourth step to stare at that glittering central cone.

But it was no use. That was all he could see; it was cone-shaped, and even that discovery made his eyes ache. It seemed to gather all the rays of light into itself and then reflect them again outward. It would have been easier to stare at a sunlit mirror. There were momentary glimpses of the thing within; then eyes swam, tortured by the brilliance.

He doubted the glimpses—thought they were imaginary, or the reflections of some other object. But there was no other object that could have caused them. He had to cover his eyes at last; he was so blinded by the glare that he could hardly see Wu Tu any longer. But he just could see her, so he walked back around the ledge toward her, keeping close to the wall for fear his eyes might play tricks; and when he reached the tunnel he stared straight into it, resting his eyes on the weird

gloom. Something moved against the dim light at the far end. Wu Tu was right: the two men who had fled toward the other tunnel had returned. They were making no noise. He could not detect a sound, although he listened for nearly a minute.

When he approached Wu Tu the Chinese girl walked away and stood with her back to the wall of the chasm. He passed between them and stood beyond them, where he could watch them both and keep an eye, too, on the mouth of the tunnel, where two men might appear at any moment.

"Where are we?" he demanded, pointing upward with the revolver. "Where's that opening?"

Wu Tu shrugged her shoulders. "Gaglajung. There is a sheer cliff on this side of the summit; and there is a great crack in a fold of the cliff, but it can't be seen from above or below."

"Where's the way out?"

"The way you came in."

"There's another. Where is it?"

"Taron Ling knows."

"You don't?"

"No, and I don't care. It doesn't matter. Win or lose all. Look."

HE WAS watching the Chinese girl. She had filled one dagger with the little liquid that remained in the broken handle she had picked up. She screwed the dagger-handle tight and tossed the broken one over the ledge. His eyes followed it. It was only then that he saw clearly what he had hurt his eyes trying to see from other angles. The ledge where Wu Tu sat was broken. Carved stone-work, once erected there, had fallen and lay in ruins a hundred feet below. Directly opposite, within that cone-shaped thing that shone beneath the pointing stalactite there stood—

"The ancient secret of the Caves of Gaglajung!" said Wu Tu. "Do you understand it?"

The thing was staggering. It was not a statue; that was evident at the first glance. It had no quality of sculpture, but an awful weirdness. Like Wu Tu in her own surroundings, it stirred in Blair an instantaneous and exciting impulse. He craved to interpret that thing unevasively, then, that moment, and to set down his opinion savagely in line and color. It challenged him. He was no longer, at that moment, a policeman, but an artist.

Thirst became unimportant. Danger dismissed itself from consciousness. There remained one emotion—awe; one impulse, to create. Within that conical, smooth, crystalline formation stood a woman. She could be seen perfectly from where Wu Tu was seated, and from where Blair stood, exactly behind her. If he moved six feet to the right or left he could see nothing but dazzling stabs of light amid an opalescent cone.

The woman was not less than nine feet tall. She stood erect in an attitude of mystic contemplation. She had been turned to stone within the stalagmitic ooze that once dripped from the rocks of the vaulted roof. But the appearance of life still remained, with all its color. She had light brown hair and she was broad shouldered, with large feet and hands, and was muscled like an athlete. Her legs looked capable of climbing mountains. Her skin was more butter- than ivory-color. It was definitely not a statue. That woman had once lived, moved, had her being.

She appeared even to breathe as the sun passed higher than the slot-like opening in the cavern roof and the changing light touched flaws and wave like irregularities on the surface of the stuff that enclosed her. At one instant it resembled mother-of-pearl—then opal—then clear glass. Gold and silver flame with red sparks appeared to leap and die away within, until the bright hair stole all the sunlight for a moment and the entire cone became pale sapphire that changed to amethyst and then flashed white again.

"Strength!" said Wu Tu with her head between her hands. Her voice was startling. It awoke hollow echoes. "Do you see how strong she was? Such as she could crack rocks—by thinking!"

Blair looked down at her. That might be a new line on Wu Tu. Was that her secret? Glutted with the loot of criminal intrigue and influence, was she seeking a more occult strength and new fields for its use? Typically oriental, that. Hundreds of thousands of orientals have abandoned material means in the quest for spiritual causes. But it calls for a different character than Wu Tu possessed—a *different integrity*. She looked bizarre, dwarfed, pretty and so feeble in comparison to the gigantic grandeur at which she stared, that Blair almost laughed aloud.

The human habit of explaining everything at once assured him he was face to face with something older than Egypt—than history—older, perhaps, than legend. It filled him with awe and excitement. It revealed the essential littleness of Wu Tu. But intuition warned him not to let her know he had seen that. He could feel his own littleness. In the presence of such fabulous antiquity he felt of no importance—an impertinence—a mere policeman—ignorant. But he hungered to draw and paint what he saw.

Henrietta? Was this her secret, that she had said she could tell to a lover perhaps, but not

to a policeman? Was Henrietta yearning too, to "crack rocks"—to steal some prehistoric scientific truth, of which this giantess within the stalagmite perhaps had been the sibyl? Did that account for Frensham's disappearance? Did it account for Taron Ling? Zaman Ali? Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu? The golden box in the commissioner's office? Was there a discoverable secret? Or were they all mad? Within the transparent cone, glowing golden now, the monstrous woman smiled like an image of Kali, bride of the Destroyer—pondered like Rodin's Thinker. What had she known, that marked her with so much dignity?

"Who built Gizeh, the Great Pyramid?" asked Wu Tu suddenly in a low, throaty voice that filled the cavern full of murmurs. "Who built Stonehenge and the temples of Peru? There were giants on the earth in those days —giants and magicians. They knew, but we don't know. What if we did know? Anyone who did know—"

Blair interrupted. "Where's that water that I hear dripping?"

HE HAD not noticed where the Chinese girl went. He had almost forgotten her. She came now along the ledge toward him, carrying water in a golden bowl that had the same smooth character and color as the ornament he had seen on Wu Tu's table in Bombay. The sudden memory made him stare again at the woman within the cone. There was a resemblance. Her features were less sphynx-like, more human, but vaguely like those on that figurine. He had drawn it in the train, from memory—had made forty or fifty efforts to catch with his pencil the strangely subhuman quality. Perhaps he had failed because he had thought it subhuman. Perhaps it was something else. Anyhow, he remembered it; it was much easier to remember than to set down in black and white.

The Chinese girl gave him the bowl. It was large and heavy; he had to take it in both hands, so he held the revolver between his knees. Then he stood at the brink of the ledge and, conscious that both women watched him although they pretended not to, raised the bowl to the level of his lips and poured the contents to the floor a hundred feet below.

"Hail—and libation and obeisance to whatever gods there be!" he shouted. Then he gave the bowl back. Echoes picked up his words and cannonaded them until they died in a whisper—"There be—there be!" He glanced at Wu Tu: "Damn you, not poison! I said water!"

"Water! Water!" said the echoes.

For a moment he thought the Chinese girl would try to push him off the ledge, but she had a less murderous motive. He was in time to prevent her snatching the revolver. Her hand went to the opening of her jacket then and he glimpsed the dagger-handle. But Wu Tu spoke to her in Chinese and she turned away, shaking the last drops of water out of the bowl with an air of calm indifference. Apparently quite unconcerned, she began to descend the sheer flank of the cavern. There seemed to be steps on the far side of a projection of the ledge about thirty feet from where Blair was standing. When her chin was level with the ledge she turned and waited, watching for a signal.

"You shall have champagne," said Wu Tu.

"Water. Where is it?"

Wu Tu got up in silence and signed to him to follow the Chinese girl, whose head promptly disappeared below the ledge. Blair ignored that invitation. Those two men in the tunnel undoubtedly had heard the echoes. They were very likely lurking near the tunnel entrance. They might be in Wu Tu's confidence, although they had probably been Zaman Ali's dependents; Zaman Ali was notorious for having cutthroats on his payroll. Having lost their master they were probably willing to murder anyone, to betray or work for anyone—or all three. They were rats in a trap, dangerous opportunists. Wu Tu probably wished to have word with them. Blair took a stride along the ledge toward the tunnel.

"Come," said Wu Tu.

"Come, come, come!" said the echoes.

She began to lead toward the steps, but Blair ignored her and went to the tunnel entrance. He heard someone with bare feet scampering away ahead of him, but when he peered along the tunnel there was no one visible. Wu Tu beckoned. He followed her, then, to the head of the steps and she went down them quickly with her face to the wall. But to Blair those steps were not more than just negotiable. They were irregularly spaced, some of them less than a foot wide, all of them more than eighteen inches deep, and there were gaps between. They overhung a hundred feet of air, with glaring rock beneath. There was nothing to cling to, not a crack in the smooth surface of the hot, hewn wall.

He dreaded unfenced heights and precipices. He stared at the cone and retraced his steps until he could clearly see the face of the woman inside it. Curiosity then became stronger than dread of the dangerous stairway. There must be some way of getting closer to that mystery. He followed Wu Tu. She was out of sight already and he was glad she would not see him groping his way with his heart in his teeth.

The eighth or ninth step was a big one. It projected nearly three feet and he rested there a moment, leaning his back against the wall and staring at the cone. From that angle he could only see the woman's face, magnified and distorted by a wave on the cone's surface. Her eyelids seemed to move when he moved. Fierce lips seemed to mumble unimaginable things. The ridge of her nose grew cynical and eaglish, cruel. Then, at the next step downward her head looked too small to be human, but the body bulged like a fat gorilla's. Lower again, she looked like someone swimming in reddish water amid deep-blue seaweed.

After that there was a gap. A step was missing. There was a yard of glaring air to cross, to a square foot of step on the far side —not much—nothing to a man in good condition—hardly more than a stride. Wu Tu and the Chinese girl had done it. But Blair's head reeled. It was a stride so ghastly, on smooth stone in slippery boots, that he had to shut his eyes for sixty seconds before he could force himself to look, and make the effort. On the step below, his boot sole slipped, perhaps an inch that made his hair rise and his backbone tighten like a racked rope.

When he recovered balance, his knees trembled and felt so unsteady that he had to kneel, then sprawl on two steps. After about a minute he looked downward to test his nerve. At the bottom, seventy or eighty feet below, in the shadow of the wall, very close to the edge of the glare, he saw a man's corpse that appeared to move in spasms.

It was nearly a minute before he could see that the body lay still and was being torn by vultures. Two of the filthy brutes had scented carrion even in that pit. While he watched, a third one circled downward from the opening, around and around the cone, its shadow splurging black on the crystal and its wings disturbing silence with a noise like wind in a forest. Two more of the death-watch from the broken fangs of Gaglajung followed, and cast their shadows on the cone. With his head on the step, Blair thought the woman in the cone suggested then, from that angle, a figure of Despair, frozen in self-contemplation.

HE CRAWLED after that on hands and knees, hugging the wall as he groped his way downward one step at a time, until he reached a smooth, projecting stone about six feet wide that formed the threshold of an opening in the wall. But the opening was only half the width of the stone slab. It was smooth-hewn, shaped like an elongated horse-collar, with the narrowed part at the bottom. Wu Tu stood in the opening with her back to a passage that grew dim ten feet behind her.

"Now you look less like a strong savage!" she observed with a mean smile that made her look ten years older.

Blair thought of having to reclimb those steps. The thought sickened him. But it felt good to be standing on wide stone. It was good enough for the moment. Anger returned to his aid, along with primitive emotions that included a desire to kill Wu Tu and hurl her below to the vultures. She was watching his eyes and choosing words. She chose with peculiar skill, if she meant to enrage him further:

"In uniform, Blair, with all the greatness of the government's authority, you're one thing. But now you're naked—and there's no government! How does it feel to be mere Blair Warrender without a friend or a servant? Why not blow your whistle?"

It was true, he did feel naked. Not nude, naked. His torn, soiled uniform had lost the quality which cloaks bewilderment beneath assumed official calm. He had lost self-assurance. He was nakedly scared. But the truth is a two-edged weapon. It stiffens some men, though it weakens others. He began to try to ride fear—to command it, compel it, change it into alertness. Wu Tu detected a change in his eyes.

"Look." She pointed. He turned. There was no room to stand beside her in the opening so he leaned against the curiously carved edge and stared again at the wonderful cone, with the sweat running out of his sleeve on to the revolver in his right hand. Seen from that point the cone took a different shape. It was crystal-clear, faintly golden colored, with ruby-red and emerald and sapphire points of sunlight dancing to the beat of the observer's pulse.

The woman within the cone appeared to stand exactly on the level of that opening in the rock wall. She faced exactly toward it—gazed straight into it. Her eyes seemed alive and deep blue. Human, huge, incredible, unlovely, splendid, ponderous but not coarse, clothed in mystery that numbed imagination, she imposed a silence that was silvered by the echo of running water. Even thought obeyed her. Millions of years of living silence brooded in the dead, who had once lived, who had perhaps loved.

"Come and drink champagne," said Wu Tu suddenly. "I can't bear it. She makes me solemn. When I'm that way I want to smash things. That's why vandals break old monuments. They can't endure them. I'm a vandal in spite of myself. If I had some dynamite I would blow her to hell."

She led the way into the tunnel—sharply up-

hill—stifling—barely head-room. Blair pulled off his tunic. The sound of splashing water, that had emphasized the silence of the cavern, grew louder and made thirst almost maddening. There were hundreds of bats squeaking and swarming in dark fissures in the sides of the tunnel; the sloping floor had very recently been swept clean of their excreta, but its stench was in the hot air. The tunnel was shaped strangely.

It rose sharply from the entrance. Down the midst the floor was worn in a hollow trough that forced him to walk carefully; it resembled hollows he had seen that he knew had been made by bare feet century after century.

At last a platform, pitch-dark, with a sensation of an opening in the darkness beyond—perhaps another tunnel. But on the left hand there was a low square opening; and light beyond it. Wu Tu ducked and passed through. The sound of water splashed like music on his ears, so Blair followed, holding the revolver in front of him. He had to bend almost double to avoid the low roof. It felt like crawling into a nest of specters. Three candle-flames in red-glazed lanterns cast a blood-red glow and leaping shadows on the walls of a room, apparently a perfect cube of twenty-eight or thirty feet, hewn from the rock.

All around, except at the low opening, was a ledge about eighteen inches high and two feet deep, forming a shelf on which golden-looking objects stood. In one far corner was a big stone cistern like the one in the Great Pyramid of Gizeh. Above that was a gash in the wall, through which water, beautifully colored by the candlelight, poured into the cistern, overflowing through a deep slot in the brim to a hole in the floor, where it vanished. The Chinese girl was kneeling on the floor beside three hampers of provisions.

Wu Tu, with her face blood-red in the lantern-light, pointed to Blair's revolver. "One shot left! Save it for Taron Ling! The fool who had Zaman Ali's extra cartridges lies below, where he can't be reached. Zaman Ali shot four fools. He would have shot those others, they had served their purpose and weren't to be trusted; but he had to husband ammunition after the fool he thought he could trust fell from the steps and smashed himself. It doesn't pay to trust fools—ever."

UNDER cover of his tunic Blair opened the revolver, removed the one unused cartridge and put that in his pocket. Wu Tu started at the noise of the breech snapping shut, but she could not see what he had done.

"The safety catch?" she asked him.

"Yes." He strode toward the water, laid his folded tunic on the ledge beside a golden-looking vessel, stuck the revolver into a crack in the wall, put his helmet on top of the tunic—all neatly and slowly to prove to himself that he was in no haste. Then, suddenly, he plunged his head into the cistern and let the descending water splash on the back of his neck. That was heaven, if a contrast of experience is heaven or hell, as some say.

He drank very little but rinsed his mouth and throat. Then he raised his head and pulled off his shirt. The girl on the floor beside the hampers cursed in Chinese because he had splashed her, but Wu Tu laughed and came beside him. In a moment she had dropped her sari and jumped into the cistern, ducking her head under, plunging and revelling in the cool, clean water.

"Come on, Blair, in with you!" she gasped. He had a mind to go in boots and all but thought better of that, and took them off. In a moment he was in there with her, slipping against the slimy sides and, digging hot toes into the cool, soft sediment of centuries that lay inches deep on the bottom.

"Chamber of initiation—font of baptism!" said Wu Tu, spluttering and laughing. "*She* got into this, I bet you! Could she get in? Was she too big? Have some champagne, it tastes good in a bath!"

Blair glanced at the Chinese girl. Her back toward him, she was emptying one of the hampers, on the floor, almost straight between him and the low, dark entrance. It was velvet-dark there—a black square blot on a wall stained dark-red by the lantern-light. But something in the blackness moved. His eye caught it. He watched. A man's face, spectral, almost darker than the darkness, gradually took form.

For a moment he thought it was Taron Ling returned to life and his skin crept up his spine, but he knew that was nonsense. He decided it must be one of the men they had left behind in the other tunnel, so he looked for the revolver in the crack in the wall. It had vanished. But the man's face was still there, very low, near the edge of the dark, in the mouth of the low, square opening.

He leaped suddenly out of the cistern, with the red light like blood on his wet skin, and sent the Chinese girl sprawling. He grabbed the revolver from the hamper, where she had half-hidden it under napkins. He had no cartridge now, it was in his pocket.

He knew he was a perfect target in the lantern-light—knew, too, that the Chinese girl and Wu Tu were behind him and not likely to neglect an opportunity. So he was quick. He reached the opening in three leaps—stooped—stared, and froze motionless. There was a finger on the face's lips. There was a

signal—a very low whisper. Chetusingh, haggard, wild-eyed and corpse-like, but unmistakably Chetusingh, crawled backward until he became one with the darkness and vanished.

"Taron Ling?" demanded Wu Tu from the cistern.

"No," he answered. "Nerves. I thought I saw him."

"Why did you whisper then? I heard you."

"If you want to know," he said, "I was praying. I'm chattering nervous."

She climbed out. "Have some champagne." Red light glowed all over her.

"You look like a devil in hell!" he said laughing. The laugh sounded nervous and seemed to convince her. He made a show of recovering self-control—pulled out serviettes from the hamper—tossed her several of them—rubbed himself dry with two others, and put his sweat-wet tunic on again. Even that disgusting anticlimax could not lower his spirits now. Chetusingh had told him Henrietta was not in immediate danger. He had time for what the commissioner called "facts, not fireworks." He dressed swiftly and reloaded the revolver.

There was a sudden pop, then, like a cannon going off. The Chinese girl poured champagne into a big cut-glass tumbler. Wu Tu gulped half of it down. That at any rate was not poisoned. Blair took the tumbler from her hand and drank the other half. It was warm, but good dry wine; it found his nerves and seemed to pour along them.

"What next?" he demanded.

"Food," said Wu Tu, who was wrapping her sari around her.

Chapter Ten

> Good? Bad? Those are relative. I have not seen one without the other; they are two sides of the same thing, and the thing is integrity, which has no opposite. Treachery may have integrity and may do good, as when a traitor betrays a devil. Integrity may ruin thousands, as when nations go to war for a principle, which may be right or wrong. The wrong may have the more integrity! Integrity is a thing in itself. It is a middle way between good and evil. It serves best him who has it, but he has it not unless he use it. And he has it not if he should try to use it for a momentary profit. Good? Bad? Neither of those affects the balance of the Infinite. But Integrity? That is the length, breadth, depth, weight, essence and proof of Character, which is Quality. And Quality is the goal of evolution. Aim ye at that, and ye aim at eternal life.
>
> —From the Ninth (unfinished) Book of Noor Ali.

THE food was warm, unappetizing tinned stuff, hardboiled eggs, fruit, and some leathery looking chupatties. Eggs and fruit might have been drugged. That was even probable. Wu Tu tried to force them on him, so Blair chose a tin of sardines, which he could open for himself; they were unappetizing without bread, but the chupatties were a too obvious trick. He refused more champagne; there had been time for the Chinese girl to doctor what remained in the bottle. Wu Tu drank none and she did not order a second bottle to be opened. She ate seated on one of the hampers, looking like the devil in the red light, with her hair wet and the Chinese girl trying to rearrange it.

Blair walked up and down examining the golden objects on the low hewn shelf. He was in no hurry now—none whatever. Impatience might slam the door on a secret that seemed on the verge of revealing itself. The next move should be Chetusingh's. But Wu Tu might have a card up her sleeve, and the thing to do was to discover that, if possible without letting her suspect its discovery. She was talkative, attempting to conceal excitement, and a bit too evidently eager to feel her way toward an exchange of confidences.

"Guess the value of that gold, Blair. It *is* gold. Every bit of it's gold. But it's hard. It can't even be marked with a hammer."

"How do you know it's gold?" he demanded. He tapped the barrel of the revolver against a molded, massive thing that his utmost strength could not move; it was in the form of two big pythons coiled on one another. It sounded solid.

"When it's melted the bullion merchants buy it as gold," she answered. "Two or three times' melting takes away its hardness, but the difficulty is to get it out of here without people knowing. All the small stuff has gone, except that bowl that we use to carry water. Why did you spill the water? Did you think I'd poison you? I need you."

"Who took all the small stuff?"

"Zamin Ali. There were eighteen gold blocks and fifty figurines; he melted all but two gold blocks that General Frensham took, and one figurine that I have. I believe you saw it."

"How do you know Frensham took them?"

"Oh, I know lots of things. One of the two that he took found its way into the police commissioner's hands in Bombay. Taron Ling tried to get it. His magic wouldn't work be-

cause the commissioner hasn't the right sort of imagination. Two of Zaman Ali's men recovered the other block from Frensham's suitcase at the time when he disappeared. Zaman Ali shot those thieves last night. They swore it had been stolen from them and he knew that was a lie, but he was so afraid of magic that he couldn't wait for Taron Ling to make them tell where they'd hidden it. Now I suppose it's lost forever."

To get her to talk, and to gain time was Blair's immediate problem. If he appeared not particularly interested, she might reveal more in an effort to get his attention. So he took one of the red-glazed lanterns and examined the golden objects on the hewn shelf. To become competent in his profession he had had to make himself familiar with Indian religions, but these things reminded him of no religion he had ever studied.

There were forty-nine pieces. They might be idols or religious symbols. They excited imagination. But except for that one example of coiled serpents, they suggested nothing he had ever seen and no answer to the riddle they presented. They were not Hindu. They were not Buddhistic. They were as weirdly shaped as the most fantastic designs of a Futurist sculptor in rebellion against three-dimensional limitations. They had a motive; that much was obvious. They had rhythm. But neither rhythm nor motive was intelligible.

"How long have you known of this place?" he demanded.

"Two years." Wu Tu was watching him intently, but he behaved as if unaware of that. Her attitude and expression were lynx-like. She appeared to be judging his mood and her chance. She went on, "Frensham knew about it first—I don't know how long ago. He was only a major when he met that Bat-Brahmin who calls himself the Guardian of Gaglajung. Somehow he persuaded the Bat to talk. Most Bats are drunkards. Probably he gave him whisky. That Bat is a superstitious fool who only knows the legend. He has never dared to enter the caverns. He has never been into the tunnel. Generations of Bat-Brahmins have known of this place without ever daring to enter it.

"The hermit guided Frensham in—and went mad. Did you see him? Frensham took two of the blocks, which was all he could carry. He meant to return for the others, but the Bat-Brahmin threatened to have him broke out of the army for sacrilege. That was no joke either. He could have done it. Frensham didn't dare show those blocks to anyone. But I found out about them."

She paused, weighing the effect of her words. Blair decided she needed some encouragement. He set the lantern down and walked slowly toward her.

"You're a wonderful woman," he said with admiration in his voice.

Her eyes betrayed a hesitating triumph. She was not quite sure of him. But she said something in Chinese, and the Chinese girl withdrew to a little distance, picking up the lantern he had set down and putting it back beside the two others. That produced a shadow into which she sidled, Blair almost lost sight of her; but with the corner of his eye he could just catch the color of her daffodil pyjamas. There was treachery coming.

"You're a great woman," he repeated. He was standing almost over Wu Tu, looking down at her.

"No, not great yet. I propose to be," she answered. "Will you help me to it?"

"You need my help? Rot!" he retorted. "How about helping me? You said you would. You're unbeatable. How do you do it? How did you discover all this?"

THE Chinese girl had moved away from the lanterns. She was hovering behind him now, and he had to watch Wu Tu's eyes. The water pouring into and out of the cistern filled the place with sound; his ears had grown accustomed to it, but he had to depend on his ears and listen to Wu Tu at the same time, without betraying his alertness.

"Frensham's wife died eighteen years ago," said Wu Tu.

"Well? What of it?"

"Men need women."

"I get you."

"Frensham is a learned simpleton," she went on. "He was learned and intelligent enough to know he had stumbled on a priceless secret if he could only interpret it. He was too reverent to play the vandal, and too afraid for his own reputation to admit he had trespassed into a forbidden sanctuary. But he was jealous, too. He didn't want to share the secret with anyone—jealous and simple-minded. He wanted somebody to open those blocks without injuring the contents. They're hollow and he suspected they contain tablets or something like that, with some kind of writing on them. Why he trusted Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu I can't tell you; I would sooner trust a cobra. But I think Dur-i-Duran Singh had done him some financial favors. Unbusinesslike people such as Frensham are easily psychologized in that way.

"He asked Dur-i-Duran Singh to find him an expert metallurgist who could be trusted to keep secrets. Dur-i-Duran Singh consulted me. I got a clever girl to entertain Frensham and find out the secret. Frensham is a father-

ly old thing, and he liked to talk to her. He didn't say much, but he told her enough to make me more than interested."

"Drunk?" Blair asked.

"No. Couldn't make him drunk. He's abstemious. Besides, some men don't talk when they're drunk. That isn't the best way."

Blair changed position until through the side of his eye he could see the Chinese girl standing ten feet away from him quite still; she appeared to be interested in the red light on the running water. Wu Tu continued:

"It was then that Zaman Ali came in, because I needed someone capable of tracing Frensham's movements backward to all the places he had visited on leave or in the course of duty. Zaman Ali was a greedy thief and a bully, but there was no one better for the purpose. He back-tracked Frensham to Gaglajung.

"With a nose for loot like Zaman Ali's it wasn't long before he suspected the Bat-Brahmin and guessed where to look. But the Bat-Brahmin proved difficult—denied everything—threatened to raise a riot and bring police on the scene if Zaman Ali dared to trespass. Bribery didn't work. So I consulted Dur-i-Duran Singh again, and he sent Taron Ling. Magic terrified the Bat. Taron Ling made him see elementals and hear voices. Then he hypnotized the hermit. But even Taron Ling couldn't get into the caverns. It was I who did that."

Blair felt a prick on the back of his right hand. He bit and sucked it instantly. His left hand—his eyes were watching Wu Tu's and he had seen her signal—moved with the speed of a knock-out punch and seized the Chinese girl's right wrist, twisting, twisting. He did not dare to take his eyes off Wu Tu. He twisted the girl's wrist unmercifully, but she neither screamed nor let go the thin-bladed dagger. She writhed like a snake and tried to reach Wu Tu, who jumped up and snatched at the weapon. Blair sent Wu Tu sprawling. Then he rapped the girl's knuckles with the barrel of the revolver until she dropped the dagger. Kicking the dagger along the floor in front of him to keep it out of Wu Tu's reach, he picked up the girl then and dumped her into the cistern, where he held her head under so long that Wu Tu screamed at him:

"A lakh of rupees! I pay a lakh! Let her up!"

So he let her go, picked up the dagger and sniffed it after biting and sucking the back of his right hand again until it bled freely. Then he pointed to the hamper:

"Go back there and sit down!"

But the Chinese girl seemed all-important. Wu Tu hurried to the cisten and tried to comfort her, helping her out and talking to her rapidly in Chinese. The girl took it ali quite stoically. When she had coughed water from her lungs she slipped away from Wu Tu, ignoring Blair as if he were nonexistent, and went and sat on the floor near the lanterns, where she continued coughing and retching for several minutes. The tone of Blair's voice changed perceptibly:

"Is the drug in this dagger the stuff that made Frensham talk?" he demanded. "What is it? What does it do—paralyze the will or something?"

"Don't be a fool, Blair. There's no drug, and that was an accident. You startled her. She didn't mean to scratch you."

"I'm going to scratch you and see if it makes you talk," he answered. "Come here."

"No, Blair! No, no!" She retreated slowly. Her eyes were like a desperate animal's, her hands ready to scratch. She was like a cat at bay. "No, no, let me talk, Blair—let me tell you."

"Very well," he said, "sit there. Go on talking or you'll feel the point of this thing. You were saying it was you, not Taron Ling or Zaman Ali, who found the way in here. How did you do it?"

WU TU sat down on the hamper; full in the lantern glow. "Blair," she said, "I thought you were a fool policeman, but I see you're clever. I will trust you. I will tell you everything. What did you do to Taron Ling? You didn't kill him? Tell me—did you?"

"Wait and see," he answered. "Go on with your story."

"Let me tell in my own way, Blair. You terrify me—stand back. You promised—"

"Yes," he said, "I promised." He stood back from her two paces. As the friend I said I'd be, I give you one chance."

"Are we friends if I tell?"

"Policemen haven't friends," he answered. "Only enemies, protégées and allies. Which are you?"

"Blair, I said I'd give you Henrietta. I can do it."

"Where? When?"

"Listen to me, or you'll regret it! Do you want to kill her?"

"If a hair of her head's hurt, I'll make you suffer for it," he answered grimly.

Wu Tu was equally grim. "You'll be the death of us all unless you listen to me! There is magic in this place! That woman out there inside the crystal was the queen or the priestess of a race of giants who existed long ago—no one knows how long ago—and died out—vanished. How? Why?

"Frensham found a tablet in here, but he couldn't read it, so he borrowed Taron Ling from Dur-i-Duran Singh of Naga Kulu. Taron Ling can put a person into trances. Frensham never let Taron Ling see the tablet. He didn't trust him. He knew too much about magic and trances to trust a practitioner. He kept the tablet hidden in a box, into which he put his hands through two holes. But what he understood in the trance he couldn't remember afterwards; it was like trying to remember a dream. So he had Henrietta to watch Taron Ling and to write down whatever he might say while in the trance.

"To make extra sure of Taron Ling, he handcuffed him to the wall at the opposite side of the room. It was a very small room, but Taron Ling couldn't overhear much. However he managed to steal some of the notes Henrietta made. I've read them, but Dur-i-Duran Singh won't part with them. He thinks about nothing but money and laughs at magic, but all the same he's superstitious and he thinks those notes are—what was that noise?"

Blair's ears felt as if they twitched. But he knew, if it were Chetusingh, he could count on a definite signal. That sound might have been made to attract his attention. "Nothing," he answered.

"Yes it was!" Wu Tu looked thoroughly scared. "I heard a sound in the passage. Is it Taron Ling? If it is—you have one bullet—shoot him!"

Blair was listening intently, but he went on talking. "Why?" he answered. "To oblige you?"

"Yes! Blair, kill that devil! If you don't, he'll kill me. There, I heard him again. Kill him, did you hear me! I tell you, kill him!"

"What's your hurry?" The strange thing was that the Chinese girl seemed undisturbed. She had taken off most of her clothes and was wringing them dry. Between the red light and the shadows, against a background of unexplainable golden moldings and a dark wall, she looked like old ivory—a master-carving, done by a man who knew what motion is and how to suggest it. Wu Tu made a sudden grab at the revolver—missed it—tried to snatch the dagger, and then knelt. She seized Blair's knees. She was almost sobbing. Her voice was tragic:

"Blair, do what I say or we're all damned! If you don't kill Taron Ling, he'll kill me and he'll either kill you or use you! What he wants is Henrietta. Do you hear me?"

"And if I kill him?"

"I will take you then to Henrietta. But I daren't—I daren't as long as Taron Ling is in the caverns!"

"Silence!" he commanded. Wu Tu clung to him, trembling, holding her breath. He felt her fingers dig into the muscles of his leg. The water splashed and gurgled in the cistern. The Chinese girl stepped into wrinkled trousers and stood, calmly observant, unsmiling, unconcerned apparently; making almost no noise with her bare feet, she walked to the cistern and, plunging in her arms, groped for her lost cigarette tube.

She found it almost at once and blew through it to get the water out; it made a sharp noise, like a toy trumpet. Then she walked back to the lanterns, found her cigarettes there somewhere, picked up a lantern, raised the colored glass and lighted her cigarette at the candle. She appeared uncertain where to set the lantern down; she moved it to and fro several times before putting it back where it was before. To whom could she be signaling? How many more than two of Wu Tu's or Zaman Ali's men were in the caverns? Did Wu Tu want that one shot actually used, or did she want to see it wasted? Should he tell her Taron Ling was dead? He decided not to—not yet.

"There's no one there," he said in a distinct, level voice, but he felt certain someone lurked in the darkness of the low entrance to the chamber, watching, listening. "Why are you afraid of Taron Ling? He's only a charlatan. You know as many tricks as he does. You were boasting just now that he couldn't even get in here until you led the way."

She answered hoarsely, "Blair—I beg you—kill him! If I hadn't a soul I wouldn't care—I wouldn't be afraid to die—I'd fear nothing! But I have a soul! I wish I hadn't! So have you, and you'll wish you hadn't if you don't kill that devil!"

Softly to himself Blair whistled three bars of a familiar tune that stole on memory. He saw no kindly light that led, but—

"Soul?" he said. "Have you turned pious?" He was watching the Chinese girl's cigarette that moved in quite unnecessary lines and dots as she smoked—took the tube in her fingers—smoked again. She had the damp pyjama jacket in her left hand. There was no real need to shake it; in that stifling heat it would have dried in a few minutes. One of the candles drooped forward and blackened the lantern glass. Another guttered and died. The remaining one faced Blair and Wu Tu, like a danger signal set in the throat of darkness.

THE square entrance-hole was now a black blot on the dim red darkness of the end wall. Tired eyes strained in the reduced light and Blair began to wonder how long he could carry on without sleep. His eyelids became

suddenly heavy. It was difficult to fix attention simultaneously on Wu Tu, the Chinese girl and the entrance-hole. Sensation—or lack of it—warned him his reserve of nervous energy was perilously near exhaustion. But his ears were alert.

He detected a faint sound that might be a trigger—or a glass tube snapping. He glanced at Wu Tu. In that split second he felt consciousness slip from his grasp. He was blinded by an explosion of magnesium light that seared the scene into his memory. At the same time there was a sensation of being struck, he never knew by what; it was painless, heavy, deadening.

He hit out blindly. He had dagger and revolver; he used both, not knowing what he struck at. Wu Tu clung to his knees. He kicked—swayed—felt his knees yield. Then, for what seemed endless time, he lay still with a roar in his ears, and a vision blazed on his retina of three men, of whom one looked like Chetusingh; of Wu Tu and the Chinese girl; and he thought the Chinese girl had done something to him, he didn't know what.

Foreshortened memory was there, too, blended with it all—the giantess within the cone in the sunlit cavern—the tunnel where Zaman Ali and two others lay dead—the ash-floored sunlit charnel-house—the tunnel beyond it—Taron Ling, dead and alive at the same time—the shrine, the Bat, the hermit, and Ganesha's image inscrutably smiling. The giantess within the sunlit cone changed presently to Henrietta; she receded to a vast distance and looked terribly lonely; he felt responsible for her loneliness. He knew he loved her, and wished to say so.

In a nightmare, he climbed up and down ghastly steps on the face of a precipice, trying to reach her before Wu Tu could prevent him. That effort led him gradually back to consciousness, until the roaring in his ears waned and changed to human voices. Then mortification and shame swept over him, that he should have been caught off-guard. He felt himself an arrant failure.

The first voice he recognized was Chetusingh's. He could not hear what Chetusingh said but the tone of the man's voice conveyed a sensation of horror. He was not speaking English. He addressed somebody as Soonia and then Jenny, which sounded off-key and incongruous, until he remembered that Soonia and Jenny were two of Wu Tu's names. Soon after that he recognized Wu Tu's voice, and then full consciousness returned, although he felt incapable of movement. He could not even move his eyelids. He lay as if paralyzed by a blow that had left his brain functioning.

Wu Tu—angry—excited—vigorous—was speaking English. Her eyes stared at him out of the dark, through his own closed eyelids. He felt a sickening distrust of Chetusingh. Had Wu Tu told the truth? Had Chetusingh turned traitor? He kept on speaking Hindustanee in a monotonous voice that droned against the splash and gurgle of the water in the cistern. He was answering Wu Tu's questions:

"I obeyed. I have not seen Taron Ling. I brought *her* here, did I not? I lied. She did not believe, but she came with me nevertheless. And I protected her from Zaman Ali and his men, who wanted to make her afraid so that Taron Ling might control her more easily. But I think she can not be controlled, unless this man does it. She has not spoken to me since I told her Bee-lair Warrender will come soon."

"Idiot!" That was Wu Tu's voice again. "I ordered you to say I bring him. That without me he could not come to her. Why didn't you?"

"I did. After that she was silent."

"What else have you done?"

"As bidden. I summoned these two. Here they are. That they are dead is not my doing. There were two of Zaman Ali's men on the ledge up yonder. They came toward us three, very fearful, saying that Zaman Ali lies dead of a knife-wound and that two more of his men lie dead beside him.

"Taron Ling, said they, is somewhere in the tunnel. They invited us three to go with them to Taron Ling. They said Taron Ling has put magic on Bee-lair Warrender, who will therefore obey Taron Ling whatever comes of it; and consequently there is nothing else to do but to take Taron Ling's part and to kill you, seeing that you can do nothing with Bee-lair Warrender now that Taron Ling is controlling him.

"They said Dur-i-Duran Singh of Nague Kulu is your enemy, and you his, though you pretend friendship. And that Taron Ling is faithful unto death to Dur-i-Duran Singh, who will bestow great rewards when he possesses the secret of Gaglajung. Whereas, said they, Wu Tu is likelier to kill, as she killed Zaman Ali, in order to have all for herself. And they said you will kill *her*, and Bee-lair Warrender also, as soon as you have what you want, because you will wish to keep it secret. Taron Ling, said they, will be too clever for you; he will kill you. . . . Then there was a quarrel, because your men answered hotly. There were blows and the end came swiftly; they two fell into the great pit, where vultures were already picking one of Zaman Ali's men. After that, we three came hither."

"Slow! Late!" Wu Tu spoke savagely. But

Chetusingh answered like a man in a dream, or as if broken by punishment until nothing remained but the will to obey.

"Step by step as bidden—no haste—no delay—no excuse." That phrase sounded suspiciously like a formula impressed hypnotically on his mind. "I lay there in the dark and made a signal to Bee-lair Warrender, to betray him, to gain time while I summoned these two. Could I have done better? How should I know he had dagger and pistol? I did not know. I did as bidden."

"Dog!" she retorted. "Two good servants dead, and worse!—no more drug for the dagger! Would to God I had not wasted stuff on you that cost a fortune! Who protects us now from Taron Ling? You? Who undoes Taron Ling's hold on him? You? Who shall manage Henrietta Frensham? You?"

"I don't know," said Chetusingh's voice wearily in English.

"Go!" she commanded. "Find Taron Ling. Kill him!"

"I have no weapon."

"Find one, or else kill him with your hands! Don't dare to return to me while Taron Ling lives!"

BLAIR felt the blood coursing again in his veins, but shame and contempt for Chetusingh were his chief sensations. He almost forgot his own predicament. Chetusingh had been his discovery—his comrade-in-arms.

He felt his eyelids flutter. He got a glimpse of the shadowy chamber, but saw very little, closed his eyes again and lay still. It would be better to let Chetusingh get out of the way. Then, when he was gone, he would jump up suddenly and snatch the lantern; that would give him a slight advantage. He listened for the Rajput's footfall and almost disbelieved his ears when—thump and slither on the rock floor—he recognized a familiar spacing of sounds. None but he and Chetusingh knew that code. It was an almost similar signal to the one Chetusingh made with bare feet in the passage in Wu Tu's house in Bombay. It meant:

"Am acting independently and can't communicate."

Did Chetusingh know he was conscious? How did he know? Had he seen the momentary flutter of the eyelids? The Rajput's retreating footfall—he was evidently barefooted—rutched along the floor, paused at the opening, hesitated—

"Go!" repeated Wu Tu.

There were sounds as if Cheutsingh groped in the dark for something. It appeared he found slippers or sandals which he slapped on the floor or the wall before putting them on—habit that—to get the dust out, or to avoid being stung by an insect—a perfectly natural action, almost automatic. Thousands of Indians do it. But the slap-slap-pause-slap-pause-slap-slap was a signal as plain as the other had been—meaningless to anyone but Blair and Chetusingh. To them it meant:

"Give me time for necessary details and await my signal."

After that he heard Chetusingh scramble clumsily, as if he were dog-tired and indifferent, along the ten or twelve feet of the low, square entrance-hole. He heard him get to his feet at the far end. Then he heard him drop the little metal box in which he kept materials for preparing *pan*, stuff that he never chewed but never went without because an offer of *pan* is like a proffered cigarette; it serves sometimes to open intimacy with strangers. He could be heard groping in the dark for the fallen box. He fumbled it. Then he opened the box and snapped it shut. That signal meant: "No immediate danger."

Did it? Their code was a system of normal movements such as any one might make in almost any circumstances. The first and second signal might, conceivably, have been made by accident. But three signals running seemed beyond the pale of coincidence. On the other hand, Chetusingh had told Wu Tu he made a signal previously for the purpose of betrayal. Whom was he betraying now? Benefit of doubt is doubtful policy when death creeps uncoiled in the dark. Wu Tu boasted Chetusingh was her man. Was he?

Wu Tu spoke suddenly in Chinese and Blair opened his eyes a fraction. He saw the Chinese girl, fully dressed now, bend to take up the one remaining lantern and follow Chetusingh. She paused at the far end of the low opening, seemed to listen to Chetusingh's retreating footsteps, and at last set down the lantern and remained beside it. It was safe to open his eyes wide then. It was pitch-dark except for one spot of reflected red light dancing on the water that poured into the cistern. At the far end of the low entrance was the lantern, ruby-red, like a point-light in an underground railway tunnel.

But he closed his eyes after a moment. Wu Tu lifted his head to her lap—touched something to his nostrils. It had a faint smell, but whatever it was she shook it as if it was empty and he heard her set it down. After that her fingers caressed his temples and passed over his eyes. "Sleep!" she commanded in a low voice. "Sleep! Sleep" He found it difficult at first to stay awake. He had been exhausted and sleepy before this happened. Lassitude stole over him. The gurgling water harmonized with her voice. He could almost

The giantess stared forth, awesome, splendid. . . .

physically feel magnetic influence stealing over him and he began to see her eyes again through closed eyelids.

He reminded himself that there is no such influence; that by suggestion mesmerists persuade a victim to impose obedience on himself. Nevertheless, he felt consciousness slipping. But her eyes, that he saw without seeing, aroused anger. He resented them—rebelled against the impudent trickery that compelled him to see them. Had she done something of the sort to Henrietta? The thought of Henrietta in Wu Tu's clutches stirred an impulse to kill. But the same impulse aroused caution. He must first have Wu Tu's secret—Henrietta's—Frensham's. Secrecy is the key to secrets. He lay still.

THERE was something hard between the back of his hand and his leg. He guessed it was the empty revolver. By pressing his hand against that he hurt it sharply where the Chinese girl had pricked him and he had bitten the wound to make it bleed. He kept on doing it. The pain intensified alertness. By continually relaxing and increasing the pressure he avoided becoming used to it.

"Sleep!" commanded Wu Tu. "Sleep! Sleep! Sleep and forget—and forget." Her hands moved rhythmically caressing his eyes and temples. Some or her sensuous perfume still clung to her clothing. Heat, the sensation of darkness, the sound of flowing water aided her. Stab—stab went the pain in his right hand. He was awake, alert. But he breathed evenly, relaxing his neck-muscles so that his head lay heavy on her lap. "Forget! Forget!" commanded Wu Tu. He remembered every detail of her previous attempt on him in Bombay. She pinched his ear but he was ready for it—lay still. She pinched until her nails almost met in the lobe of his ear, but he betrayed no sign of having felt it. The voltage of his anger increased with every stab of pain, but he welcomed the pain because it proved he was conscious.

"You are asleep," she said, "but you know. Marie speaks to you. You are happy—oh, so happy, because Marie gives you Henrietta. You desire and you love Henrietta with all your heart."

The position of his neck across her thigh had become almost intolerable. He moved slightly. She took his head in both hands and re-settled it in her lap. "Sleep! Sleep! You are asleep. But you can speak when I tell you to speak."

The terrific difficulty was to lie slack. If he had allowed alertness to make his muscles rigid she would have noticed it. Mesmerism very likely was her last card, if it was true that her supply of drug was exhausted. To defeat her, he must convince her she was winning. But it is easier to feign strength than weakness. He was afraid he might sneeze. Fear created the impulse. Not to sneeze, then, was his height of attainment of self-control. He did not sneeze, and the effort of will left him more than ever master of himself. He no longer saw Wu Tu's eyes through closed eyelids. His imagination functioned normally; he could bring up any mental picture he wished; could see himself, for instance, unshaven, in a filthy uniform, on his back on the floor of a hewn rock-chamber, with his head in the lap of the most dangerous woman in India.

He did not enjoy the danger; but he admired that woman with a patient, merciless and deadly admiration that exceeded, by a thousand times, his regard for the tiger he had shot dead the previous night. His admiration for her was her greatest danger. She might spring surprises, but he would be ready.

"Sleep!" she commanded. "Sleep! You are in a deep sleep. But you can hear and you can answer. You think what I tell you to think. You have no other thought. It makes you happy—very happy—very, very happy to think what I tell you. You have no voice except to answer me. You are about to go to Henrietta. You love Henrietta. Answer me. Do you love Henrietta?"

"Yes," he answered, picking a tone of voice at random. It appeared to satisfy her.

"And you trust me, Marie. Answer, do you trust me?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Yes, you trust me. I am Marie, who am more than a lover and more than a friend. Blair, Marie—Marie, Blair—we two trust and understand each other. When you awake you will forget Wu Tu; you will forget Jenny and Soonia Singh. You will remember Marie, who is your friend and guide. Answer. Whom do you remember?"

"Marie."

"Marie has wisdom, experience, courage. Marie is the wisest woman in the world. Marie knows how rotten all the world is, with intrigues and treachery, and she despises it, so you also despise it. Like her, you despise the little official cowards with big names and authority. They call Marie Wu Tu, and they know she could ruin them, men and women. She knows their secrets. But you know why she doesn't ruin them. Marie is great and generous. Great and generous. Marie deserves to be great. Answer: what is Marie?"

"Great," he answered. "Great and generous." He could feel her thrill to the answer.

"Now you will go to Henrietta because

Marie sends you. Henrietta loves you. You love Henrietta. But she is in danger because she has stolen the secret of the Woman of Gaglajung. She is in deadly danger. You will go to Henrietta. You will love her savagely—savagely—strong, sweet, overwhelming. You will make her tell the secret. Win it from her. Make her tell it to you. Henrietta may demand your promise not to tell the secret to Wu Tu. You will make that promise. Henrietta does not know Marie. It will be Marie, not Wu Tu, to whom you will tell it. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"What secret will you find out?"

"Henrietta's."

"What is it? Answer."

"The secret of the Woman of Gaglajung."

"Will you tell it to Wu Tu?"

"No."

"But to whom will you tell it?"

"Marie."

"Nothing is important except Henrietta's secret. You will make her tell it to you. It is so important that you will rather die than not learn it. You will learn it from her. You will tell it to me. Answer. To whom will you tell it?"

"Marie."

"At once to Marie?"

"At once to Marie."

Her thigh muscle moved. He felt her leaning forward as if listening. Down at the far end of the low opening the Chinese girl coughed on a peculiar note and made noises by shifting the lantern. The sounds appeared to convey information. Wu Tu relaxed a little. Then she laid both hands on Blair's forehead and continued:

"Taron Ling is the enemy. Are you afraid of Taron Ling?"

NOT knowing on the spur of the moment how to answer that question, Blair was silent. A principle of hypnotism is to tell the victim what to answer before asking a question. This one might be a trick, to discover whether he was really under hypnotic control. She repeated it. He continued silent. If it was a test, she appeared satisfied. She resumed:

"Taron Ling is the enemy. Answer. Who is the enemy?"

"Taron Ling."

"You do not fear Taron Ling. You despise him. You do not fear him in the least. He has no power over you, no influence over you. You do not fear Taron Ling. He only knows a little silly magic such as works on superstitious fools. He may be able to control Bat-Brahmins and hermits, but not you and you don't fear him, because Marie protects you from him. Answer. Do you fear Taron Ling?"

"No."

"Who protects you from him? Answer."

"Marie."

"When you awake you will not remember Taron Ling. You will remember Marie, your friend. You will obey her because you understand her, and she loves you and protects you. Answer. Whom will you obey when you awake?"

"Marie."

Again she appeared to be listening, for the space of forty or fifty heart-beats. Again the Chinese girl made noises that perhaps conveyed information. They ceased. Against the sound of splashing water Blair could hear Wu Tu's heartbeat and his own—out of time with each other—hers fluttering fast. It was nearly a minute before she continued:

"Chetusingh is a treacherous swine and a liar. Chetusingh is Taron Ling's dupe. Certain women put some poison into him to make him sensible but Taron Ling deceived him, made him see things, and confused him. Now he is doubly treacherous, obeying first one and then the other. He will try to kill Taron Ling. But Taron Ling will kill him. It doesn't matter. Chetusingh has served his purpose, which was to go with a message to Henrietta before daybreak, saying you wished her to accompany him for secret reasons. Henrietta will ask you, was it a true message? You will say yes. Answer. Was it a true message?"

"Yes."

"Chetusingh is a traitor, but he gave a true message to Henrietta. But now he betrays her. He betrays you. He is a swine of a Christian convert. You hate Chetusingh. Answer."

"I hate Chetusingh."

"You love Marie because she guards you against Chetusingh and Taron Ling, who are a pair of devils. What are they? Answer."

"Devils."

"Let us hope they kill each other. All men die who seek the secret of the Woman of Gaglajung. Frensham sought it. And where is he? What happened to Zaman Ali and those others? They are dead—dead—dead. But Henrietta is to be the mother of Blair's children, not a victim of the Woman of Gaglajung, whose curse is on all who violate her Secret. Save Henrietta from that! I, Marie, fear no curse. I violate no secret. I will take all consequences. I am Marie, rich in wisdom. I will know and preserve the secret in my heart of hearts!"

She paused, trembling with excitement. Her hands pressed on Blair's forehead. Emo-

tion poured along them, like a stream of will; it was contagious, but not as she meant it to be. It sharpened the intensity of Blair's resistance and revived his energy. His thought worked wholly independently of hers. He saw the logical conclusion of her purpose. Should she learn the secret she would try to kill both Henrietta and himself. She would share it with no one.

But she feared Taron Ling, that was evident. Fear of Chetusingh, too, might explain why she had inveighed against him. That was a point in Chetusingh's favor. Almost super-humanly crafty in some respects, Chetusingh might risk the chance of being killed for treachery, in order to gain an objective.

Wu Tu's weakness was her belief in her own hypnotic power; but without drugs to assist her she was only an amateur. Chetusingh would appreciate that. He might have found some way of avoiding the effect of the drugs. If so, his obvious cue was to pretend to be hypnotized. He had always been the best actor on the police force. By convincing Wu Tu that he was thoroughly hypnotized, Chetusingh might overhear or worm his way into her secret plans. Supposing he had learned of her intention to hypnotize Blair, he would guess what Blair would do about it. They had worked together too often and successfully for him not to guess that Blair would pretend to fall into the trap. Chetusingh from that minute received benefit of doubt.

"Wake!" commanded Wu Tu. "Wake and remember all I told you! Wake!"

He lay still. If he came too quickly out of the trance she might suspect him. She began slapping his face. "Wake! Wake!" But he lay still.

THE Chinese girl returned with the lantern and held it to his face, but that light was not strong enough to make him blink. So she produced an electirc torch from one of the hampers and flashed that full in his eyes. The glare was unendurable. He let his eyelids flutter. The girl wet a cloth at the cistern and slapped his face with it. He came to then, sat up and looked bewildered.

"Do you know who I am?"

He looked into Wu Tu's eyes. He allowed recognition and pleasure to creep into his. "Marie," he answered. Then, as if he suddenly remembered why and what: "Where's Henrietta? I must ask her something." He got up, feeling stiff and a bit uneasy but alert and competent. He put his arm around Wu Tu and spoke caressingly: "Did I turn down your offer in Bombay? That was silly of me. You're the one to trust. A man can tell you anything. You keep secrets."

"I—yes—I keep them!" She said it with set teeth.

He snatched the torch from the Chinese girl, flashed it around the walls as if he had forgotten where he was, and turned it at last on two dead bodies. He recognized both. Those men had stood at the foot of the stairs in Wu Tu's house in Bombay.

"Who?" he demanded, putting a hand over his eyes as if trying to remember.

"My servants, Blair. You killed them—shot one—stabbed one. But I won't tell who did it. Look."

"I? I don't remember killing them," Blair said.

"No wonder. They hit you hard. They and that swine Chetusingh attacked you suddenly. You—"

He bent down and examined the bodies. He remembered he had held the dagger in his left hand, the revolver in his right. One man was shot through the heart; he very likely had killed that one. But the dagger was between the other man's shoulder-blades in such a position that he could not possibly have done that left-handed. Someone else had used the dagger. Someone must have snatched it from his hand as he fell—must have driven it to the hilt into the man's back from behind. There could be no drug now remaining in the handle of that weapon! It was a blow of which neither Wu Tu nor the Chinese girl was capable. Wu Tu, he remembered, had been clinging to his knees; she could not possibly have done it. Chetusingh was the only alternative. It was just such a blow as Chetusingh would strike, if put to it—Rajput-fashion—no half-measures.

"But I don't remember this," he said. "I don't remember it."

"They hit you on the head," Wu Tu repeated. " Your face is wet, isn't it? We bathed it, to make you recover. What *do* you remember?"

"Henrietta!" he said instantly. "Where is she?"

Wu Tu nodded to herself. Blair looked away from her to hide the triumph that he knew was in his eyes. He had her beaten. Checkmate now in one or two moves.

Chapter Eleven

I have had one hundred and one chelas, of whom one alone had too much wisdom in him to demand why I, his Teacher, had revealed to him no great hidden secrets. Are they not hidden? Are they not hidden in each one's consciousness? I am a Teacher. I am a gardener, awaiting sun, rain, growth; ob-

servant and perhaps, if diligent, preventing trespass. I can cultivate, prune, encourage. I protect. But the seed is within you. As the yearning of the lover to reveal true love to his beloved, is the hunger of the Teacher to reveal the Secrets to his chela. Unto love, and unto love alone, love shows herself, as a reflection in a pond at sunrise. Unto inward wisdom, Wisdom is revealed. Truth echoes Truth. All else, in the words of your Gospel, is pearls that the swine tread underfoot.

—From the First of the Nine Books of Noor Ali.

IT SEEMED probable that Wu Tu would behave herself for the time being. Murder might be in her mind, but what she wanted first was Henrietta's secret. Blair was as keen as Wu Tu on that. But what the devil should he say to Henrietta? Even supposing he should get rid of Wu Tu somehow, and then find Henrietta, there still might be one or two of Wu Tu's men to be dealt with. She was much more likely than Zaman Ali to have well-paid and therefore faithful adherents, who would probably have weapons. He had none.

There was a weapon available, but to have pulled that dagger from the dead man's body would have alarmed Wu Tu. He was better without a weapon than with her suspicion aroused. Her overconfidence was all-important. In the dim chamber, with the red glow from the lantern on her face and the electric torch revealing a panorama of weirdly shaped golden figures as a setting, Wu Tu looked hardly human. Mystery had taken hold of her imagination. She looked hungry, determined, cruel.

She undoubtedly believed she was using occult forces. There is nothing comparable to the obscene fury of the would be magician whose mental treacheries are circumvented. She would be like a baffled cobra if disillusioned. She might kill Henrietta out of sheer spite.

"Why do you wait?" Wu Tu demanded suddenly.

He was not so sure then that he had her beaten. The dilemma was obvious. She was testing the control of her will over his, directing him mentally, using a form of telepathy that has sent many a weakling to the gallows. The difficulty was, her thought made no impression on him; he was unable to detect the slightest tremor of directing impulse. He had never been able to let his thought be directed by others, although he and Chetusingh had tried to practice it for the sake of better teamwork. However, he decided to pretend to receive directions and to take the chance of making a wrong turning.

The Chinese girl snatched at the torch but he pushed her aside roughly, turned the light on the entrance-hole and started forward as if he had suddenly received an overpowering impulse. But he wondered whether that was the right thing to do. His confidence, that had been so strong a few minutes before, was waning. He would have preferred to have Wu Tu in front of him where he could see her.

The Chinese girl followed him so closely, and so fast, that his spine tingled, as he hurried on hands and knees through the low passage. True, he did not expect to be stabbed. He reassured himself that there was not the slightest fear of that until Wu Tu should have attained her objective. But there was no doubt about the crawling sensation it gave him to have the girl so close behind. At the far end of the opening he stood up instantly and flashed the light in her face. She only smiled. It was the friendliest smile she had given him yet, but she was quite possibly laughing at his discomfort or at the disreputable state of his clothing. It would be like a Chinese to do that, at that moment. She said nothing. Wu Tu came through the opening slowly, not on her hands and knees but bent double, pausing repeatedly, appearing to listen, either in deadly fear of Taron Ling, or possibly expecting reenforcements.

Blair turned to the right and started down the tunnel, with the idea of reaching daylight before reenforcements could come. The prospect of some more enemies in the dark was even worse than the dread of the climb up those projecting steps on the flank of the pit. However, it seemed he had turned the wrong way. Wu Tu betrayed the strain she was under.

"Stop!" she commanded, pointing tragically with her left arm toward black darkness. He turned the torch on the darkness beyond the low chamber entrance. It revealed an opening in the rock wall. He entered. It turned left, right, left again into the rock, not wide enough for two abreast, but high enough for that ancient giantess to have used it without stooping. After three zigzag turns he found himself in a clean-cut, smooth, descending passage, in which there was bat-filth but plenty of air.

He wet his finger. The draught of air came toward him. There were marks here and there in the filth that resembled human footprints, but it was very difficult to distinguish them by torchlight. Walking was not easy; the narrow floor was worn trough-shape and was nowhere more than three feet wide, but the

walls sloped outward, so that at the height of his head the passage had a width of four or five feet. The roof was irregular and gave foot-hold to hundreds of bats that squirmed and squeaked as the light disturbed them.

The passage curved and turned on itself without any evident reason. There was not a fault in the walls anywhere—no carvings, ornaments, inscriptions. Direction was very difficult to keep in mind, but his impression was that he had made almost a complete circuit and had descended fifty or sixty feet, if not more, when at last he saw indirect daylight that streamed across the passage fifty feet ahead, where there was a sharp right-hand turn. Facing the turn, on the left, there was a slot-like opening into which the light poured.

THE opening revealed a dim chamber with a shelf all around it, similar to the one from which he had just come. The wall was damp where water poured out of one hole and into another, but there was no cistern. The place had been cleaned out recently. Facing the light was one huge, apparently golden figure that resembled nothing recognizable or comprehensible, unless it was an effort to suggest unknown dimensions. If it really was gold its weight and value beggared imagination. Near it was a plain camp-cot that had been recently used; the pillow bore the imprint of some one's head. The clean white overlying sheet was rumpled. Near the cot, on the floor, were a plain enamel wash-bowl, towels and a hamper that might contain food. Beside those, also on the floor, were two large suitcases, both marked H. F.

Blair went straight to the cot and discovered a vanity case beneath the pillow. He recognized that instantly as Henrietta's. Wu Tu, as quiet as a mouse, came in behind him and stood by the suitcases. He scowled as he turned and faced her. The Chinese girl, dirty, disheveled, impudent, hovered behind Wu Tu, looking like her evil genius. She leered at the bags and vanity case as if her thought possessively explored their contents. That brought Blair's anger suddenly to the surface. Speech exploded from him:

"Get out of here, both of you!"

Wu Tu smiled. Her shoulders relaxed, as if his anger resolved a doubt. But her smile looked ghastly in the light that streamed through the opening. She looked fifty years old, with strained eyes and the suppleness gone from her limbs. Mentally as well as physically she seemed exhausted. She sat down on the cot.

"No, you get out of here," she answered. "Find Henrietta." She reached for the vanity case and Blair snatched it away. The suitcases were closed but unlocked; he put the vanity case inside the nearest one and reclosed the catches. Then he pushed both suitcases under the cot.

"Yes," said Wu Tu, "you do love her. Find her. She is your woman."

That enraged him. But Blair's anger never governed him for more than fractions of a second. Instead it stirred his self-control and set him calculating. If Wu Tu felt so sure she had him hypnotized that she was willing he should interview Henrietta lone, why disillusion her? Besides, he did not know yet how to get out of the caverns; Wu Tu very likely did know. It was important to get that information before challenging her vindictiveness. He, too, was weary in every fiber of his being; it was easy to look beaten.

He strode to the water, drank from his cupped hands, bathed his eyes to take away the smart of sleeplessness, stared at Wu Tu as if he hardly recognized her, and walked out like a man in a dream. Behind him Wu Tu spoke in Chinese. When he glanced over his shoulder she already lay sprawled on the cot with her head on the pillow. She seemed to be failing under the strain. The girl was massaging her feet. Immediate interruption from that quarter appeared improbable.

Blinking, he walked straight toward strong daylight. Twenty feet beyond where the passage turned it came to a sudden end at a strangely carved opening with a wide stone threshold, almost exactly like the one at the foot of the projecting steps, the thought of which still made him shudder. But this opening was much closer to the bottom of the great pit.

Looking up, he could see the other threshold, and some of the ghastly steps beyond it, like broken teeth stuck on the smooth rock. The great cone in the midst of the pit was far above the level of his eyes and looked creamy white from that angle. It was no longer transparent and he could not see the woman. From the threshold where he stood a flight of irregular steps descended to the floor of the pit; they were like the steps higher up except that these were much less difficult. There was no other way to go.

He went down, slowly, accustoming his eyes to the light and keeping close to the wall for safety; he was so tired that he could hardly trust his sinews.

The light was not nearly as dazzling as it had been. His watch had stopped, no doubt broken, but he knew it must be long after noon. From where he was, he could not see the sky, but it was obvious that the sun no longer shone directly into the cavern. There was a wide shadow at the foot of the wall. The

floor of the pit lay in waves of creamy stalagmite; almost like wax from a guttered candle; but farther away where the light was more direct and stronger it looked like mother-of-pearl. One gorged vulture was perched on a wave of the stuff to his left, and he could hear atrocious, echoed noises made by others that tore at dead men's bodies out of sight in some hollow beyond. Many of the waves of stalagmite were more than head-high, but a smooth, worn, narrow track wound among them snakewise in the general direction of the central mound, on which the great cone glowed with color that changed at each step he took. The cone fascinated; it was almost a physical impossibility not to stare at it.

The echoes of his footsteps were awe-inspiring and like no sounds he had ever heard. There was an extraordinary sensation of committing sacrilege. He felt like taking off his boots, to prevent the echoes from making his skin crawl; some of the echoes seemed to come creeping stealthily behind him. That sensation was so real that he glanced backward to see whether he was being followed. Then, in that second, he heard Henrietta's voice so close to him that he almost jumped out of his skin.

"Blair, is there no getting away from you?"

The training of a lifetime saved him from making an hysterical exhibition of himself. If nerves had voices, his would have shrieked. Between anger, surprise, relief, astonishment, his silence congealed like something solid.

"Wu Tu sent you?"

That stung him. Anger overwhelmed all the other emotions. Like a man in the ring taking punishment, he hid the sting, banked anger, smiled mercilessly. The change in his expression frightened her. Words died on her parted lips.

BEHIND her was a canvas camp-chair on which she had been sitting. She was wearing a frock like the one of the night before, that had made her look so beautiful by moonlight. The frock was quite clean. She was barefooted; her kicked-off sandals lay beside the chair. She was standing within a stone dome, like a soap-bubble, except that the film of stalagmite of which it was formed was at least a foot thick.

He saw her through an opening, three or four feet wide, eight or nine feet high, hewn wider at the top than at the bottom. A rectangular pattern of light poured through that opening, and lay on the floor like a golden carpet. Other opalescent, dim light penetrated through the thin stone; it was like light through a stained glass window, subdued and mystic. It stirred in Blair a maddening sense of beauty—the emotion that some men shout about but others cherish in excited silence.

He had never loved any girl as he did her in that moment. Never was he less inclined to speak of it or to reveal it, or even to confess it to himself. His tired senses yearned to her. Mind, memory, intellect all blended in a sudden recognition of her as his woman, his and his only, adorable loot of the battle of life, to be seized, had, held and cherished. But resentment burned a no-man's land between them, and her eyes grew pained, brave, regretful as they met his, unflinching.

"Yes," he said, forcing his voice at last. "Wu Tu did send me." He said it cruelly, through set teeth. It hurt him. He intended it should hurt her. How could he say he loved her? She believed he was Wu Tu's lover, or something like it. Could he deny Wu Tu had sent him? He even perceived a ghastly possibility that Wu Tu's influence was stronger on him than he knew.

Was he his own master? This flood of emotion—was it genuine? Was he reacting to Wu Tu's mental influence? That was no moment to speak, think or behave as a lover. If he should ever come to take Henrietta in his arms, that should be his own, not Wu Tu's doing. The more he loved Henrietta, the more savagely he cursed Wu Tu. His eyes glowered with indignation.

"Why have you come?" Henrietta asked. "Blair, do you know what a state you're in? Are you hurt?" She shuddered. "I saw a vulture. Someone fell off the ledge, and—"

His stare silenced her. She stepped backward, afraid of him. But he was only wondering what the devil to say to her. Suddenly the obvious question forced its way through set teeth:

"Are you all right? Not hurt?"

"Quite all right, thanks. Blair, go away, please, for a while. Chetusingh said you would come, but I didn't believe him."

The policeman surged to the surface. He retorted hoarsely:

"Why didn't you believe him?"

"Why should I? There was nothing to stop you yourself from telling me, was there? Why should you send Chetusingh with such a message less than twenty minutes after I had left your camp?"

"Very well, why did you go with Chetusingh?"

"Because I wished to come here. I didn't trust Chetusingh, but I would have gone with almost anyone who mentioned this place, even at the risk of meeting you again and being tortured with questions. But I was almost sure the message was a trap. I knew well what they wanted me for."

"What *who* wanted you for?"

"Wu Tu's agents. They had watched me in here. Wu Tu questioned me in Bombay as I told you, and her men have watched me ever since. They kept me out recently by making the Bat-Brahmin afraid to admit me."

"Why?"

"Perhaps they thought they might make me talk. But I didn't. I refused to bargain with them."

BLAIR stepped in through the opening. He sat down on the floor with his back to the wall, too tired to stand any longer. He nodded to her to take the chair.

"Blair, are you ill?"

He dismissed the suggestion with a shake of the head that let him realize how much his head ached.

"Look here. Henrietta, there's been hell to pay—men murdered—God knows what else. If you'd confided in me in the first instance none of that might have happened. Tell now."

"Blair, there are things I can't tell."

"Will you answer questions?"

"If I do, will you leave me alone afterwards?"

She sat down, folding her hands in her lap. He stared at her in silence for about a minute. Leave her alone? Not likely! He and she were going to know less loneliness than she imagined, but it was no time to discuss that. He ignored her question.

"Have you seen Wu Tu?" he demanded.

"Yes. Wu Tu was in the cavern when I came here, just before daylight. Up on that ledge she and I saw the dawn come through the opening. There were two men and a rope ready to help me down those steps, but heights don't scare me. I've been up and down them alone at least a dozen times. I didn't need help. And I couldn't refuse to come down. They'd have forced me if I didn't.

"Wu Tu was perfectly polite, but I knew what she meant. She came after me—she and her maid, and when we reached the lower cavern, there were my suitcases, and food, and a cot. Wu Tu went away for a while then and left me alone with the Chinese maid. My frock was filthy, so I changed it, and the maid waited on me. After that I was sleepy, so I lay on the cot. I didn't sleep very long. Wu Tu came back and tried to hypnotize me."

"Tell me all about that," Blair ordered.

"There is nothing much to tell. I awoke and knew at once what she was trying to do. She couldn't possibly. I think she realized it."

"What was she trying to get you to do?"

"To tell her the secret of Gaglajung."

"If you know that, you're going to tell it to me," he said grimly.

She shook her head and made one of her exasperating answers: "When Wu Tu couldn't hypnotize me, she asked would I tell the secret to my sweetheart? I haven't one. I said so. Now she sends you."

Blair's response was more like a snarl than a laugh. He hated to have his hand forced by Wu Tu's impudence, but there was nothing else for it, he must play his last card. He decided to do it, then, that instant. He got up and walked toward her, knowing he looked unprepossessing, to put it mildly, unshaven, in a filthy uniform.

"Henrietta," he said. "Look me straight in the eyes. That secret's in the line of duty. I'm going to know it whatever it costs. Last night you said, if I were your lover, you'd try to tell me. Go ahead then and try! Goddammit, I hate to admit I love you when there's an obvious ulterior motive. Damn Wu Tu to hell for that! But I'm telling the truth. Don't interrupt. I'll not behave like a lover—not now—I'm all over bat-filth. Listen."

There was nothing to do but listen to him. Blair, in that mood, was overwhelming, deaf to argument and blind to opposition. He stood over her. There was no avoiding his eyes.

After one swift and searching gaze she closed hers. That veil, that he had sworn the night before would cover her if she were naked, seemed almost to materialize out of the weird light. It increased his vehemence. He set to work to tear the imagined veil to shreds, with ruthless down-strokes of self-revelation, the more violent because he restrained all actual gesture.

"You want to fall out of love with me? Dammit, you can't. I won't let you. I'm in love with you up to the hilt. If that entitles me to know your secret, tell it. But I warn you, your lover is one thing; Blair Warrender the policeman is another, who'll listen—and do his duty."

Her upward glance lingered a moment. Then she looked down at her naked feet until all signs of emotion had vanished, except from her eyes. He was about to speak when she looked up again and asked him:

"Do you think the policeman would know what his duty is?"

"Try me," he retorted.

"To oblige Wu Tu?"

He took hold of her shoulders and almost lifted her out of the chair. She stood up, facing him, and they were silent. He was furiously seeking right words. He rejected phrase after phrase as futile, unworthy, meaningless. He hated cant. Jargon at that moment would be blasphemy. But he could

not make words obey him. It was she who spoke first:

"Blair, it's the first time I've ever seen exactly that look in your eyes."

"Well, what of it?" he exploded. "It's the first time I've said I love you, isn't it? You're looking straight at the truth. And by God, if you throw Wu Tu in my teeth again I'll go and kill her. She has been trying to hypnotize me, to make me do just what I am doing. She believes, if you'll tell me your secret, I'll tell it to her. I'm making love to you—"

"With your thumbs? Blair, you're -"

"By God, I'm sorry. Did I hurt?" He took her in his arms, hugged her to him, kissed the red marks where his thumbs had pressed her shoulders. "Journey's end!" he said. "And only God knows why it didn't happen sooner!"

"Blair, yours feel like everlasting arms!"

"So they should. It's forever."

"Blair—"

"Wait. I've something else to say now. Keep your secret. Do you hear me? I'm not buying it. Until you're satisfied that Wu Tu hasn't put this over on me, I'd as soon you didn't tell me. You and I—dammit, I won't spoil this. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she answered. "I understand you. Blair, there's nothing I won't tell you—nothing. But if *you* don't understand, you mustn't blame yourself or me. I love you. I believe you. And I will trust you to the end of the world, but—"

He was about to interrupt. Words were obeying him at last. Emotion, as he held her in his arms; broke down the dam that normally restrained his speech. Words that he had never used to any woman marched before his mind in splendid sequence. But she tried to push him away. She stiffened suddenly. He held her tight and glanced, from instinct, over-shoulder in the direction she was facing. Then he, too, stiffened.

Wu Tu stood in the entrance. Her eyes glinted avarice. There was fight in her. Her smile was Borgian—sly, ingratiating, ruthless. She was stooping slightly forward, with a hand on each side of the narrow opening. She looked horribly old, as if Time, in the last hour, had overtaken her and stripped her of all but her determined will to live. It was several seconds before she spoke:

"Tricked me, did you? Too full of Taron Ling for Marie to control you? Oh, yes?"

WU TU came in. The Chinese girl appeared then, behind her, standing in the entrance. Wu Tu removed the electric torch from the chair-seat and sat down uninvited. The Chinese girl squatted in the entrance, lit a cigarette and smoked it insolently; she achieved a gesture with her cigarette-tube that almost shouted aloud of secret and insuperable resources.

"Well? What?" Blair demanded.

"She will tell you now," said Wu Tu. "She is your woman. Didn't I say it?" She nodded to herself, watching his eyes, and when she spoke again there was a hard, unfamiliar note in her voice: "But you won't tell me—eh? You thought you fooled me, did you? Well, I'll tell *you* something! Chetusingh is dead. Taron Ling killed him. I have spoken with Taron Ling. He killed him. He waits! There is no way out except the way we came in, and the other—the Secret way! Let her tell it or take the consequences! Deal with me or Taron Ling! We four against Taron Ling, or you lose Henrietta!"

She had something beneath a fold of her sari, but Blair could not see what it was. Henrietta nudged him to call his attention to it. He suspected a weapon; she might easily have had one cached somewhere and have fetched it as soon as his back was turned. There was no mistaking the glitter in her eyes. She was desperate, determined—quite probably mad. The Chinese girl looked overconfident but alertly on guard. The look of confidence changed to alarm when suddenly, through the opening, there came a sound that might be an echoing footfall. She stood up—stood on tiptoe, craning her neck.

"Taron Ling!" said Wu Tu, and got out of the chair. Her expression became ghastly. Her voice, too, seemed to have grown old in a moment.

"You or Taron Ling!" she exclaimed and whipped out a nickel-plated small-bore automatic. "Poisoned bullets! What now?"

The Chinese girl produced another automatic and covered Blair with it. She handled the weapon nervously, but it was a range at which even a duffer could hardly miss, and the nervousness made her doubly dangerous. Blair stepped in front of Henrietta and stood still, listening. Wu Tu was too full of purpose to listen; she ground out words like a panther's snarls:

"Show your hand, Blair! Which? I'm shooting you or Taron Ling! Which is it?"

Henrietta whispered. Blair could not hear what; but he noticed she was frightened; until then, although she had detested Wu Tu she had not seemed in the least afraid of her. The worst of it was that he, too, felt afraid. Wu Tu was mad. He was sure of it. At one and the same moment he had to watch Wu Tu, speculating as to what her next move might be, and try to listen to that sound outside. It resembled a footfall, but it seemed to come no nearer. It might be a signal.

If it was Chetusingh, that only complicated matters. And who else could it be? Wu Tu might not have lied. It was quite possible that Chetusingh had discovered Taron Ling's dead body, and under cover of darkness, had whispered to her, making her believe he was Taron Ling. But if Wu Tu should learn that now, she would shoot for a certainty. She went on snarling:

"Taron Ling gets Henrietta if I shoot you! Do you hear me? He'll make her talk. I'll shoot him afterwards. Speak now! Do you make her tell? Or do I?"

The sound outside grew louder, but not nearer. It resembled a footfall on echoing rock, made by someone wearing slippers, who rutched his feet. Tap-tap-tap-rutch-tap-rutch-tap-rutch-tap-tap-rutch-rutch-rutch-tap—"Carry on while I go for assistance," that meant. Pause. Then again the tap-tap-tap-rutch—It was Chetusingh's signal.

The problem was to answer it without informing Wu Tu. Unless it were answered, Chetusingh might come nearer. If Wu Tu should learn it was he, not Taron Ling, she would leap to conclusions and probably shoot Blair instantly. She looked desperate enough to tackle Chetusingh then; she and the Chinese girl might lie in ambush for him; or the Chinese girl might do it while Wu Tu stood guard over Henrietta. What she would do after that to Henrietta was something that Blair preferred not to guess. How to answer that signal?

He had to be quick.

"Half a minute," he said as calmly as he could, half-turning toward Henrietta but keeping his eyes on Wu Tu. "I don't know the secret yet. I will ask her to tell it to me. Let me talk to her alone a moment. You don't listen."

With his right arm around Henrietta he passed behind the chair. It was the kind that can be taken apart and rolled up; the top piece came away easily when he grasped it in his left hand. Wu Tu thought he meant to use that as a weapon and said one word in Chinese; she and the Chinese girl crouched instantly, aiming their automatics like desperate amateurs.

"Poisoned bullets!" said Wu Tu.

"I'm going to make a noise with this," he answered. "You're not to hear what I say, that's all."

THE place was almost circular. He led Henrietta to the wall, exactly opposite the opening, wondering whether sound would travel out of the place more distinctly than it crept in. He struck the wall hard with the piece of wood—tap-pause-tap-tap, for attention, and whatever the effect might be, outside the din was deafening under that glass-like roof. Wu Tu could not possibly hear what he said. He changed his signal to tap-tap-long pause-tap-tap, and kept repeating it.

"That means, 'your signal understood,'" he said to Henrietta. "We'll have help soon. We've got to gain time. Taron Ling is dead. Wu Tu doesn't know it." He kept on hammering the wall, with an eye on Wu Tu, estimating her impatience. "Will you temporize? Offer to tell? Pretend to tell, to gain time?"

Henrietta nodded. "I would rather die than tell her. I will tell you. Then you do as you please."

He ceased hammering and threw away the stick. "Miss Frensham is afraid of Taron Ling," he said to Wu Tu. "She will tell me the secret on condition that you keep Taron Ling at a distance. Can you do it?"

"Taron Ling is afraid of poisoned bullets." Wu Tu answered. "That's why he daren't come near unless I summon him." But she herself looked wretchedly afraid—obsessed by the explosive fear that is the strength of madness.

Blair spoke to her in an almost confidential tone: "Leave us alone while we talk. You and that girl keep Taron Ling away. Get outside there and watch." But he knew that was only a lame expedient. If help should come, Wu Tu would be aware of it first. She looked desperate enough to do instant murder then, and after that to shoot the girl and herself in baffled rage and disappointment. However, any expedient was better than none.

Contempt and cunning showed on Wu Tu's face. She was about to answer when Henrietta interrupted. She stepped forward, freeing herself from Blair's arm, and faced Wu Tu with a restraint of gesture that revealed rather than disguised loathing. But she spoke gently:

"You have worked for months to get this secret, Wu Tu, haven't you? I would never have told it to you. However, I can't let Mr. Warrender be shot, so I will tell him. He may tell you. But not in this place."

"Where?" Wu Tu demanded. She growled like a dog; within a space of hours she had become a hag, with a voice like rasping metal.

"You shall see where we go," said Henrietta. "You may follow, but you must not come near or interrupt until the moon shines through the opening up there."

"Hours!" snarled Wu Tu.

"Not many hours. You must keep Taron Ling at a distance. Otherwise I'm helpless. I'm afraid of him. I can do nothing with Taron Ling near me."

Wu Tu grinned and glared: "Do you know what Taron Ling will do to you unless you—"

Blair interrupted. Madness feeds on threats of that sort. There was one chance in a hundred that she might believe her hypnotic efforts had partially succeeded. It was worth trying.

"Marie," he began, "I thought you—" He hesitated, putting a hand to his eyes as if perplexed by a haunting memory.

Wu Tu glowered at him. "Yes," she said, "I'm Marie. You remember?"

Henrietta spoke before Blair could answer: "Listen, Wu Tu. He and I have promised. But it isn't possible until moonlight. I need rest—sleep. So does Mr. Warrender. I can't sleep unless you protect us against Taron Ling; and unless I get some sleep I can't do what you ask."

"Sleep here," said Wu Tu, glancing at the entrance. "Taron Ling can't enter." She flourished her automatic.

"Even though I have to trust you to protect me, I don't like you," Henrietta answered. "I must be in the right mood to reveal this secret. You make that impossible. I came here to be alone, to grow calm and collect my thoughts. I must begin again—"

"Now that you're happy?" Wu Tu interrupted, hag-leering, incredible. Evil had come and clothed her suddenly in Time's bark. She even looked wrinkled. "It is thanks to me you are happy—isn't it?"

The argument was getting nowhere, and it was growing twilight dark. The danger increased with darkness. The electric torch lay on the floor. Blair made a sudden stride toward it. Wu Tu squeaked in Chinese and the Chinese girl, on hands and knees, was there ahead of him. She snatched the torch and covered Blair with her automatic. He took a deadly chance then—all or nothing. Henrietta gasped and distracted Wu Tu's attention for a second by springing forward in an agony of excitement. Blair kicked the pistol out of the girl's hand, made a dive for it, caught it before it fell and was back within six feet of Wu Tu before she could turn and face him.

"Drop that pistol!" he commanded.

She raised it slowly.

"Damn you—I said—*drop* it!" He could not see the Chinese girl. He could see Henrietta. The Chinese girl sprang from behind—seized his wrist—clung like a cat with teeth and finger-nails. In that same fraction of a second Henrietta sprang at Wu Tu, seized her wrist and tried to snatch the pistol. Wu Tu pulled the trigger. The shot was deafening. A lump of stalagmite fell from the roof with a crash.

The Chinese girl clung to Blair's wrist; he dragged her until he could reach Wu Tu. She fired a second shot, wild as the first. Then in a second he had both weapons, and with Wu Tu's pistol he rapped the Chinese girl's knuckles until she let go and walked away to look for her cigarette tube.

She was as suddenly indifferent as she had been recklessly determined. Except that she nursed her kicked wrist she seemed to have forgotten the incident. Wu Tu, also nursing a wrist, backed away until she reached the wall; then she called to the Chinese girl, who came and stood beside her.

"Please shoot us both!" said Wu Tu. "Please shoot!" she repeated.

BLAIR had no doubt what to do, but he was struggling with an almost hysterical impulse to laugh. He took both pistols in his left hand because Henrietta took his right hand and used her frock to stanch the blood where the Chinese girl had torn and bitten it. It was bleeding badly. There was blood on the girl's face and she kept wiping her lips with the back of her hand.

"Any more hidden weapons?" he demanded.

"No," said Wu Tu.

Henrietta tore a long strip from her frock that had been ripped in the struggle, and began to bandage his right hand.

"Come here and be searched," he commanded.

"No," said Wu Tu. "Shoot me."

"That's bravado, old lady. You know damned well I won't shoot."

"I would have shot you," she retorted. "They are poisoned bullets. You would have died if one had touched you."

He grinned at the pain in his right hand. Henrietta bandaged it carefully.

"Finished? Good. We're in for trouble now, so stand by!" He eyed Wu Tu again, emptied both automatics and pocketed the cartridges. "Strip off that sari and throw it to me!" he commanded.

The answer was suddenly passionate: "No! Don't you dare to shoot? Are you too big a coward?"

"Yes," he answered. "But I don't mind kicking you unconscious! D'you hear me?"

Wu Tu heard and evidently understood, but hesitated. Suddenly she began to plead: "Blair, shoot me! You can say that Zaman Ali, or Taron Ling or someone did it! I can't go to prison, Blair. I can't! I won't! If I can't have this secret, life's finished for me. Lots of people will be grateful to you if you shoot me—all those who owe me money—all the—"

He took one step toward her. At that she pulled off the sari, bundled it and flung it on the floor between them, sneering:

"You swine!"

Henrietta laughed: "You little thief, Wu Tu! That's my underwear that you have on!"

"Pick up her sari, please," said Blair. "Tear it into good long strips."

Henrietta obeyed.

She had to use her teeth to get the rending started.

"Now hold both pistols, and keep cool. I may have to be a bit rough."

Blair took the long silken strips and walked toward Wu Tu, smiling. "Better take your medicine, old lady. I don't want to hurt you, but I will if I must. Turn your face to the wall and put your hands behind you." He was wondering just how hard to hit if she resisted, and what the effect of the blow would be on Henrietta. He did not care in the least about Wu Tu's feelings. He was rather surprised when she obeyed him and faced the wall—not quite agreeably surprised, because obedience might mean that she could still command unguessable resources.

So he tied her wrists cunningly. Then, when he had helped her to the chair, he tied her ankles, and tied her into the chair, watched all the time by the Chinese girl as if he were a conjurer showing her some new trick.

"No need to gag you," he said. "I'll bring you water by and by."

Then, maliciously: "Shout for help if Taron Ling annoys you."

After that he tied the Chinese girl hand and foot, apologizing because he could not leave her a hand free to smoke cigarettes. She offered no resistance, made no answer, lay at Wu Tu's feet and looked up at her without any apparent emotion.

"You are no gentleman," said Wu Tu. "If you were, you would shoot."

She repeated the remark to Henrietta:

"Remember, I have warned you. he is not a gentleman!"

Blair's interest in Wu Tu's judgment on that point amounted to less than a shrug of the shoulders, but he wondered why she said it.

There was probably a motive.

It was growing so dark that he had to take the electric torch to examine the knots he had tied. The bandaged right hand had made him a bit clumsy. However, the knots looked good. He turned the torch on Henrietta—framed her in a pool of light, her white skin glowing through the torn frock. His eyes appraised, enjoyed, approved. Then, suddenly:

"Where's Frensham?" he demanded.

All the answer Henrietta made was to put on her sandals and lead the way out.

Chapter Twelve

What are the dimensions of an Idea? Length—breadth—depth? Can it be measured by foot-rule or bushel or pound? Has one of you not known an idea? Are its dimensions—in number, space and kind, not infinite? Then do ye dare to tell me, who am teaching you the virtue of rebellion against the limits of the three dimensions in which ye strangle—do ye dare—do ye dare to tell me four (of all the infinite dimensions) are beyond the compass of experience, intelligence and knowledge? What is death? Can ye, or any of your holy, learned or reputedly informed authorities assure me, and produce their evidence, that Death is not experience of life in four dimensions? Thence, death again, experience of life in five dimensions? And so on—six—seven—unto eternity. And of eternity, where is the end?

—From the Ninth (unfinished) Book of Noor Ali.

IT WAS not yet sunset; the sky showed through the gap in the roof. But the great pit was filled with gloom in which the cone-shaped sepulchre of Her of Gaglajung stood vaguely luminous. It seemed to stand on nothing, because of the darkness of the mound beneath it. The echoed gurgle and splash of water emphasized the stillness. Bats were awake; in thousands, like black particles in a whirlpool, they streamed in an ascending spiral toward the opening far overhead. Blair was almost out on his feet, from lack of sleep and physical exhaustion. The maddeningly mystic gloaming made his senses reel.

He followed Henrietta slowly, fighting an almost overwhelming impulse to let everything go to hell and just make love to her. Habitual self-discipline—that, and the lingering suspicion of Wu Tu's methods, that *might* have unbalanced him more than enough to make him act unwisely forced him to concentrate effort on getting and feeling control of himself. He did that savagely, not overtaking Henrietta until she waited for him, in a hollow between two walls of waxy stalagmite, where the shadow lay deep. Her first words shocked him:

"There will be a full moon."

What the hell had that to do with it? He was not there to talk about moonshine! The new-born sense of intimacy, sudden and delicious, that for the first time in his life had withdrawn the veil between him and any

woman, produced a characteristic reaction. He was a trained and trusted public servant, whose personal delights came last, not first.

"Where is your father?" he demanded in a quiet voice, cautious not to stir too many echoes. "Don't forget I came here looking for him."

"Please, Blair, you must wait for moonlight."

He turned the torchlight on her. Her hand trembled as she laid the empty automatics on a fold of the rock. But she was less tired than he was. Stockingless, lithe, athletic, in a torn frock that revealed most of one thigh, she looked gorgeous—like a Sabine woman, plundered and all the more precious for that.

He strode nearer and she recognized the unsecret, possessive, and strong-willed light that glowed from his eyes. No word passed between them. He switched off the torchlight, took her in his arms, kissed and crushed her breathless.

There was no India, no job, nothing for a while except they two—until the night shut down solidly black, and away up near the summit of Gaglajung the Pleiades, like jewels, twinkled through the gap.

"No more secrets," he said then.

"No more secrets!" said an echo. Every spoken word produced a hollow murmur, but some words came back unexpectedly in an exaggerated whisper.

"No. Blair, from the day I first loved you, I never wanted to keep a secret from you."

The policeman, that was the other half of Blair Warrender, resumed authority, suddenly, because that was his way.

"And your father is where?" he asked her.

"Where?" said the echo. "Where? Where?"

She nestled closer, and laughed delightedly because she understood him. It was true they could have no secret from each other. That was his abrupt way of accepting intimacy, genuine and forever. But the echoes also laughed. They were derisive. She lowered her voice.

"Blair, dear, please wait for the moon. *Don't you—won't you understand I couldn't* tell you simply and solely because I couldn't?"

"You could have tried," he answered.

"Blair, if you only knew, you wouldn't say that. While you didn't love me, but I did love you, there was one thing I couldn't even try to do. Would *you* try, now, to make *me* despise *you?* If I had tried, you would have thought me quite mad. Even if you hadn't said so, I would have known what you thought, and I couldn't have endured that. It was better you should think me venomous, or criminal—oh, anything was better. It isn't as if I *could* have made you believe. I couldn't. If you hadn't come here, you would never have seen me again. You would never have known the secret; or I think not."

That startled him. He spoke louder. "Do you mean—"

"Do you mean?" an echo whispered.

"Oh, no, I would not have killed myself. There was no need. You will understand that presently. But you would never have seen me again."

"Wu Tu would have killed you?"

"Oh, no. Wu Tu wants to learn the secret from me. If she has learned it, then it would have been too late to kill me."

"I'm being awfully patient, sweetheart."

"I know it. You will soon understand. You will see my difficulty. Father discovered this place. Do you know what his passionate interests were?"

"Passionate interests!" said an echo. It was like a mocking commentary.

"More or less. Fourth dimension ancient magic—showers of fish in deserts—sudden appearance of plants and animals on desert islands—Charles Fort's books—disappearance without trace of about a hundred thousand people every year—telepathy—clairvoyance—pretty nearly everything a soldier shouldn't care a damn about."

"True, he should not have been a soldier."

"For God's sake, where is he?"

"Where is he? Where is he?" an echo whispered.

"Wait, dear, for moonlight."

"Do you know a way out of these caverns?"

"No. And when Chetusingh brought me, I didn't care. It was good-by forever."

"But you care now?"

"Yes. You know it. We'll find a way out."

"Let's hope Chetusingh will, somehow. He has gone for help. Better hurry if you want to *show me secrets. Is your father dead?*"

"Wait, Blair—please wait. I'm doing my best. Wu Tu's obsession is to do what he did—and return and be wiser than anyone else in the world. Wu Tu knows the legends. She believes what very few people gave father credit for, that he really knew what he was doing. He investigated ancient legends about so-called lost races of giants, that once peopled the world but vanished before history, as we know it, began to be written. He wondered why and how they vanished.

He was quite familiar with the writings of Einstein, Jeans, Eddington, Whately Smith, Haldane and men like that. Mathematics was like music to him; he could think in terms of mathematics. It was one of his favorite sayings that matter is nothing but theoretical dimensions in motion. He believed there is

truth underlying the legend about how the Atlanteans, whoever *they* were, destroyed themselves and vanished, from misuse of too much knowledge. Can you imagine then what it meant to him when he discovered this place? And that priestess! Is she not plainly a hierophant? Doesn't she guard, yet tell in silence, some tremendous secret that the anciënts knew? Would he tell about this place? Would he have it plundered like Tut-ank ah-men's tomb? Would he have tourists let in?"

FROM where they sat on the rock, with her head on his shoulder, he could look straight up through the opening to the sky. He stared at the Pleiades. Then he glanced at the cone, ghostly luminous, that seemed able to steal and concentrate the starlight, like a tiger's eyes in darkness. "I can understand *his* keeping it secret," he answered. "But you?"

"I can't remember the time when he and I weren't friends. He told me everything except about Wu Tu. I couldn't help him much about this, but I did what I could. You see, I don't understand mathematics. Symbology seems as difficult to me as Chinese. There were thin metal plates, that he found by opening a gold box. He had to smash the box to open it. The gold was as hard as iron, so the plates got damaged. I helped to photograph them and the photography revealed marks which father concluded were mathematical symbols, dealing with the fourth dimension. He and I came back for the other boxes, which he had left here because it seemed the safest place to leave them. But by that time Wu Tu's agents had terrorized the Bat-Brahmin and found their way in. They took the boxes. I suppose they melted them.

"Father nearly went frantic with disappointment. He almost decided to tell the government about it there and then, to prevent further looting. But it wouldn't have looked well, would it? He had kept it secret so long and he himself had taken three boxes, and smashed one. The mildest thing the government would be likely to do would be to transfer him and completely close the place, on the ground of religious prejudice. If they did admit anyone, it would be some orthodox expert, who would measure everything and understand nothing. You know the kind of man I mean—one of those mild, safe, unimaginative scientists—the kind of man who says the Great Pyramid of Egypt is a tomb built by Cheops.

"It seemed better to run risks—take consequences, whatever they might be. It was obvious that the Woman within that cone had been immured, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years ago, by people who knew how to make liquid stone take shape and solidify and become transparent. Also they knew how to harden gold, and how to close up a gold box without leaving a seam. So they probably knew a great deal more than that. Blair, did you ever imagine the fourth dimension?"

"No," he said. "Three give me trouble enough."

"I can't imagine a fourth. But I know the theory. Something like this: One dimension is a straight line, without breadth or depth. If you move that at right angles to itself you get a place of two dimensions, don't you? You get three dimensions—that is to say a cube—if you move the plane at right angles to itself. It has depth then, as well as length and breadth. An inhabitant of a two-dimensional plane, supposing there were one, couldn't see or understand three dimensions. The two-dimensional person couldn't see the depth, could he? He'd be unconscious of it. Anything lifted off his plane in the direction of the third dimension would go out of his consciousness. He would call that, magic, because he couldn't explain it. Is that clear?"

"Go on. I'm listening."

"To arrive at the fourth dimension one must now try to imagine the cube moved at right angles to itself. We three-dimensional people find that difficult. Most of us can't imagine it at all, but mathematicians understand the theory, and they know what some of the properties of the fourth dimension are. The point is, that if anything were lifted, or in some way removed into the fourth dimension, we three-dimensional people would no longer be conscious of it. It would look like magic, wouldn't it? Well—you have heard of the ancient rope trick?"

"Never met a man who saw it done." Blair answered. But he glanced at the cone in the midst of the pit, loaded and aglow with starlight. The word impossible died on his lips.

"Father saw it—twice," said Henrietta. "He photographed it both times. A man threw a rope in the air, climbed the rope, disappeared, and pulled the rope after him. It was the same man each time. The photographs showed the man climbing."

"Where are the photographs?"

"Somewhere in the Secret Service files. Father came to the conclusion that the man merely moved away into the fourth dimension that he knew how to do that, and to return at will—or perhaps he couldn't help returning. Father developed a theory that perhaps a small percentage of the hundred thousand or more people who disappear unaccountably every year, have slipped or stumbled off into the fourth dimension by accident.

It is a theory that can't be disproved, no matter who ridicules it. And by reversing it, one arrives at another theory, equally impossible to disprove; that vegetation—insects—animals—even human beings, when conditions are right, are sometimes perhaps expelled from the fourth dimension into our three-dimensional existence, by what Charles Fort called teleportation. The theory offers a not impossible explanation for all sorts of phenomena that can't be explained otherwise."

"Dreams, for instance?"

"Some dreams, not all. Some sorts of visions, too, that have been seen by people whose veracity isn't in doubt. People on battlefields see visions. There were the Angels of Mons. Lots of people see, at times, into the fourth dimension. Very religious people sometimes do it. There must be a point or a plane at which dimensions merge or meet or extend into one another. According to father's theory, light, which nobody really understands, has something to do with it.

"He made experiments, here, in this cavern, bearing in mind the legends, and wondering why there are no graves and only that one giantess immured in stone. There are skeletons in the crypt, it's true, where Ranjeet's queen burned herself and her woman to death; and there are a few in the tunnel, but those are obviously modern; the Bat-Brahmin admits they are those of people who got in, and were shut in and never got out again.

"Ever since Ranjeet's queen cremated herself, if she did, and the heat cracked the sealed wall of the crypt, the Bat-Brahmins have known of these caverns. People who were too persistently inquisitive were admitted, and shut in, to die of hunger or by falling into holes in the dark. That is how the secret has been kept. But father noticed there are no ancient skeletons, although the legend is that a whole race perished in here."

"Perished in here!" said an echo.

BLAIR glanced again at the opening, high up, inaccessible, through which the Pleiades were twinkling now less brightly in the light of the rising moon. He shuddered but reserved comment, hoping Chetusingh would solve the problem of escape from the caverns. Wu Tu had said she knew no way out.

"Father decided," Henrietta went on, "that perhaps those ancients used this cavern as a means of escape into the fourth dimension. Perhaps they didn't like to die. Perhaps they saw there is no need to die. Perhaps that giantess was somebody who died before her time; she may have been immured, as she stands, as a warning or something like that. Or perhaps she was deliberately killed and set there as a monument to symbolize something or other; for instance, 'naked we came into the world, naked we leave it.' He thought of that. It was no use dismissing a thought unexamined; he had to use his imagination if he was to find out anything at all."

"Did he discuss all this with you?"

"Yes. But I wasn't with him when he stumbled on the right solution. He was in here on a night of full moon, and he had with him a servant who, I think, was one of Wu Tu's spies, although the man pretended to be deaf and dumb; I always thought he was pretending, but father thought not; that was why he chose him. He and the servant went where I will take you presently. The deaf-and-dumb man—he was a Bombay boy—had hurt himself rather badly. He was only wearing a loin-cloth because of the heat; father always carried a pocket first-aid kit, with iodine and that kind of thing. He signed to him to take off his loin-cloth and show the injury. The servant obeyed. He vanished—instantly."

"You mean into the fourth dimension?"

"That was father's theory. He could imagine no other."

"Did he report the disappearance?"

"No. Who would have believed it? Wu Tu—I am sure it was she—introduced him to a woman who was in her service. I did not meet her, but I knew about her. I believe the woman drugged him. I can't prove it, but I believe he used to tell her all he knew. Anyhow, Wu Tu learned what had happened to the deaf-and-dumb man, and from that time there was no shaking her off. She threatened to have father accused of murder unless he would take her into partnership and tell her all he knew. She threatened to have him accused of looting the caverns."

"Why don't blackmailed people come to the police?" Blair wondered. "What a damned fool!"

"Was he? I don't think he cared for the blackmail at all. He made no bargain with Wu Tu. He knew she would not dare to accuse him, because it was she and her agents who had looted the gold. What he decided to do was to come back and look for the servant, even if he had to follow him into the fourth dimension."

"Did he think he could bring him back?"

"He didn't know."

"And you agreed?"

"I wasn't asked. He went and did it. What would have been the use of my telling you, for instance, what I thought had happened? Would *you* have believed me? You believe me now. But would you have believed me then?"

"If you weren't consulted, how do you know what he did?"

"I will show you presently. But I should have been very stupid not to guess what he had done. He left a note for me saying where he was going, and reminding me that he had already conveyed his property to me by deed of trust. He asked me to burn the note and say nothing. I did. We had often talked over what it might mean to step off into the fourth dimension, and perhaps meet each other there.

"Neither of us ever had the least doubt of a life after death. But we agreed in not liking the prospect of death, it's such a messy and sometimes such a cruel business. I like life. I love it. But the thought of life in love with you, and you indifferent, was such a drab, unlovely prospect that I made up my mind to follow father if I could get into the caverns. I had been unable to get in lately. So when Chetusingh brought me a message, that I thought couldn't possibly be from you, I pretended to believe, and I came like a shot."

"Like a shot!" said a whispering echo.

"Wu Tu wants to follow him?"

"I think she wants to look into the fourth dimension. Wu Tu craves power. She believes she can learn black magic. She believes in it, and I believe she's afraid of it."

"Yes, she does, and she is," said Blair. "Well, she's afraid of prison. She's afraid of death. She'll learn all about both, if we ever get out of here alive. She'll have to swing for killing Zaman Ali—not that he didn't deserve it. I feel sorry for her. But when a woman like Wu Tu slips up, she has too many debtors and rivals and other sorts of deadly enemies to have a chance to escape the gallows. I know many a worse blackguard than Wu Tu who won't get hanged, but who will laugh with relief when it happens to her."

"You're not vindictive?"

"No. Vindictive people are all contemptible, and most of them are self-righteous swine. Wu Tu is about the opposite of my idea of a desirable, but if I could, I'd save her, for the sake of what she has taught me, about crooks and half a hundred other things."

"Look!" said Henrietta.

The rind of the moon rose golden in the gap, and the Pleiades vanished. The entire cavern became filled with dim light: but the great cone glittered in the midst as if cold fire burned within. The woman remained invisible, but there were swirling shapes, like opal clouds, inside the cone. They changed each second, with each fractional change of the moon's heights.

"Wait!" said Henrietta.

"Wait! Wait!" echoes whispered.

They stood up, hand in hand. Second by second the cone grew brighter, until its summit glowed like molten silver—changing—changing—the glow descending. Slowly, as the full moon stole upward past the brim of the gap, the entire cone grew suddenly silver—and then suddenly transparent. The silver vanished. It gleamed pure crystal. The giantess stared forth like a splendid statue, dead and yet strangely lifelike.

"Come," said Henrietta.

"Come!" an echo whispered in Blair's ear. But he stared and stood still. It was nearly a minute before he yielded to the tug of Henrietta's hand and followed her. Even the echoes of their footsteps were like sounds in a dream.

THERE was no longer need for the electric torch. Moonlight filled the cavern; the cone diffused it, conquering all shadows except in the segment behind the mound: even there it was not totally dark. Henrietta led into the shadow until the cone stood straight between them and the moon, and they could see the Woman, weirdly radiant. She looked alive, in motion, walking forward: tired eyes refused to believe she was not moving. From beneath, at that angle, she seemed to be staring upward at the ledge that surrounded the pit.

At the rear of the mound, illuminated dimly by the all-pervading glow, a flight of wide stone steps ascended fifty or sixty feet to a narrow egg-shaped opening. Steps and opening were probably invisible from the ledge: they curved on the face of the mound and were flanked by a natural balustrade of cream-hued stalagmite, worn soap-smooth where ancient hands, ascending and descending, had pressed on its upper surface. They were irregular steps: no two were alike: several of them were three feet higher than the step below. It was a stairway for a giant, worn on the surface by ages of use.

They ascended together, laboring up hand-in-hand, until they stood exhausted before the egg-shaped opening. Its small end was downward, and around its edge were vaguely snake-like tracings on the stone. Within was darkness. Blair switched on the torch. They ascended a smooth-walled passage, ten feet high, four feet wide, that spiraled gradually upward, worn along its midst into a shallow trough by feet that must always have marched in Indian file.

They could hardly hear themselves speak, hardly hear their own footfall: the sounds they made seemed to travel along in front of them, so that the sensation was of following other people into the home of all the booming noises in the world.

It was a long climb; the passage apparently made two complete ascending spirals within

the mound. But at last there began to be light —so much light that the torch was no longer needed. They came to another egg shaped opening in a weirdly carved wall. Through that the light shone from an enormous chamber that except for two thirds of the floor contained not one flat surface. Its curved walls seemed to be built of frozen moonlight. There was nothing else to which to compare it.

"It is only like this in full moonlight," Henrietta whispered. "When the sun shines nothing can live in this place." Even a whisper sighed like wind until its echo flowed back past them and down the tunnel.

In the midst of the place, arranged in an elongated oval, there were eighteen crystalline, apparently unhewn, natural columns. They supported the roof and surrounded an oval hollow that suggested a pool, but there was no water in it. Its floor looked like molten metal in the light that streamed through the roof, between the columns. The mirror-like surface of the pool caught, suffused and spread the light outward between the columns toward the concave surface of the chamber wall, which reflected it back, confused but soft and tolerable. The shadowy reflections of the columns seemed to swim within the wall, in fantastic and innumerable curves that changed their shape as the observer moved.

Sensation reeled. The slowly moving moonlight pouring through the gap on the summit of Gaglajung touched millions of microscopic prisms in the cone that contained the Woman. The light came through the cone into the chamber, magnified and broken into soundless, formless, spastic symphonies of chaos. The place swam in motion. Even the columns seemed to move, in an incomprehensible, measureless dance, like reeds in a whirlwind. But the air was stifling; there seemed to be no draught whatever, and that increased the weirdness.

Up between and above the columns, seen through stone as clear as crystal, like an undead corpse in water moved by multitudes of currents, stood the Woman of Gaglajung. By some freak in the shape of the crystalline stone, she appeared now to be staring downward at her own reflection. It felt like looking up through deep, clear water at an unearthly bather—monstrous, meditative, silent. When they stood still and made no echoes, there was such silence that Blair's straining ears heard his own and Henrietta's heartbeats.

Moment after moment the light increased. The oval hole through which they had entered was not at the chamber's wider end but about fifteen feet to one side of it. At the narrower, far end of the chamber, on the floor, against the wall, confusingly reflected amid tangled images of columns on the wall's curved surface, there was something not quite recognizable and yet familiar that caught Blair's eye. He walked toward it, treading as quietly as he could because his footsteps filled the place with noise as weirdly broken and confusing as the light.

Henrietta shook off her sandals and followed, but even bare feet stirred a whispering, like wind amid reeds. They passed between the columns, skirting the curved surface of the egg-shaped pool. It had been swept; the dust of ages lay in a heap between two columns, except for a small oval space in the center.

Seen close, that looked like polished aluminum. But the part in the center, about six or seven feet long, defied imagination. It appeared to be neither solid nor liquid. It looked like a pool of pure moonlight. It was very difficult to look at steadily, but reflected within it, reversed, reduced in size and gazing upward, was the Woman. There was nothing else reflected in that central portion. Blair made a move to examine it more closely.

"Don't!" Henrietta exclaimed—instant—sudden—clutching his arm. Her exclamation filled the place with rolling thunder. Blair saw the fear in her eyes. He sensed no danger, but saw that she did, so he took her hand and continued his way to the wall at the far end. The light, continually more confusing, changed every second. They were close to the wall—within six strides of it—before he saw that the curious object was some clothing.

It was a coat, folded with military neatness, topped by a two-decker Terai hat of thin gray felt, such as Frensham always wore when not in uniform. Slightly protruding from the jacket pocket was a flat metal first-aid kit-box.

Beside the hat there was an empty cigarette case of thin, polished wood, a box of matches and a felt-covered water-bottle with a fitted metal cup. Beside those was a bit of black candle-wick amid the shapeless residue of a burned-out candle. Three dead matches and three closely burned cigarette ends lay in a neat little heap together, near the wall.

"He must have sat here smoking, waiting for the moon," Henrietta whispered. "It was at full moon that the deaf-and-dumb man vanished."

"Vanished—vanished!—" said the echo and went whispering down the tunnel—"Vanished —vanished!—"

BLAIR searched the jacket. There was nothing in the pockets. He stared at Henrietta—refolded the jacket:

"Why the devil did he take his clothes off?"

"The deaf-and-dumb man did," she an-

swered. "And he found it—the fourth dimension. He disappeared."

"Disappeared—disappeared—" said the echo.

Blair glanced upward, but from that end of the chamber the giantess was invisible. Henrietta whispered again:

"Father made experiments, remember."

She moved the coat and the other things, signed to him, and they sat where it had been, side by side, with their backs to the wall, heads touching, clasped in each other's arms. A line drawn then between them would have passed exactly down the center of the place between the columns and across the pool, to the middle of the broad end of the chamber. The oval opening by which they came in was on their left-front, hidden from them by the columns.

The light kept growing stronger every second; and yet curiously soft; there was no perceptible strain on the eyes, although there was a feeling of confusion. Attention wandered. It was like staring in a dream at fascinating and convincing unreality. There appeared an exceedingly thin line, like a plane of light seen edgewise between the pool and the roof—almost like one filament of the Aurora Borealis. When Blair moved his head it vanished. When he resumed his position it reappeared. It refused to be placed. It was there and not there, but it seemed to pass upward, through the transparent roof toward the Woman. It shone, but it was less like a ray of light than like one of those slanting rays that Cubists paint, to lead imagination toward new frontiers of realism. It moved, but there was no describing its movements; its soundlessness suggested sound turned inside out, rather than silence.

Henrietta whispered excitedly: "Do what he did!"

Abruptly, she slipped off her clothes. Even so, Blair hesitated. Convention dies harder in a man. But Henrietta seemed perfectly unself-conscious. Chin on knees, she stared straight at the dreamlike line between the columns, not turning her head when she spoke again, low-voiced:

"I don't know, why—perhaps nobody can know why—this only happens in full moonlight. You can't see unless you're naked. Why, I don't know. But you'll have to resist. You must hang on."

What she saw, he could not see. But he could feel the tenseness with which she set herself against almost irresistible force that he could not feel. His jacket sleeve brushed her shoulder.

"Blair, don't! Please don't! The least touch of clothing stops it!"

Her rapt expression instantly returned. "Look! Look!"

"Look! Look!—" echoes shouted down the tunnel.

"What do you see?"

"What don't I see! I can't tell you! I suppose it's four dimensions! It's the next world! It's indescribable! When the moon goes beyond the gap—"

"Blair, come with me!" The mere touch of his sleeve on her shoulder brought her back to a world of three dimensions. She looked into his eyes. Hers pleaded. "Blair dear, do look! Then we'll both go, or we'll both stay!"

"Go where?"

"Through that! Into eternity! I want you to *see* it! Then choose. I won't go unless you come with me."

The din was a tremendous tempest of sound—weird and unintelligible voices filled the chamber; some seemed human, but they used no words that Blair knew. For a moment he thought he was hearing instead of seeing four dimensions. Henrietta was in better possession of her senses than he was; even in that state of emotion sounds did not deceive her for a second. She spoke excitedy:

"Someone's coming! Blair, there are only moments left! I won't go without you, but look—look! See! Quick, while there's moonlight!"

Blair seized the electric torch as if it were a pistol and moved his head to see between the columns.

Wu Tu stood there.

Tragically, in a hurricane of noise, she stumbled, exhausted, toward the broad end of the chamber. There she stood staring between the columns, with the Chinese girl behind her. The Chinese girl was picking her front teeth with finger and thumb; she had evidently used them to worry loose the knots on Wu Tu's wrists.

She looked young again with soft, confused light blending and re-blending on her ivory skin. Her eyes shone in that light. She said one word in Chinese and walked straight forward. But the Chinese girl stood still and continued to pick her teeth with her back to the wall.

Henrietta's whispering voice was lost in din that thundered from the passage. It exploded. It suggested heavy footsteps magnified and multiplied by echoes. Chetusingh on the way with assistance?

Blair groped for Henrietta's frock and threw it over her. Wu Tu's eyes seemed fixed on infinity. She stepped straight down into the hollow between the columns. There she raised her arms, smiled upward through the pouring light toward the Woman above her. She dropped her sari on the ground, and—like a bather entering water—touched with her toe

the central, egg-shaped place that looked like pure light. Eyes could not follow what happened then. She laughed. Instantly, where she had stood there was nothing. Like a vanished shadow, she was not there. Her laugh survived her. It reverberated through the chamber until the roar from the passage drowned it.

Then, before bewilderment had time to slacken its grip on imagination, the moon's rim passed beyond the gap on the shoulder of Gaglajung. The light waned as if turned down by someone unseen. Second by second, dim gray luminescence faded into darkness, soot-black, until Blair could not even see the outline of Henrietta's face. But the din grew greater; it was like the tramp of an invading host in ammunition boots. Henrietta was speaking, but he could not distinguish what she said.

He was listening for the Chinese girl; she might be on the prowl in the dark, and he did not want to be murdered. Henrietta leaned on his shoulder to shout in his ear. Then the din ceased—suddenly, as if a lid had shut tight, although the echoes mumbled away down the tunnel. Stifling heat and darkness blended into silence that bred terror, until a loud, gruff voice demanded:

"Blair—where are you?"

"Are you—are you—are you—?" asked the echoes.

Three lights—an electric torch and two lanterns—suddenly shone in the entrance. They were not reflected by columns and walls as the moonlight had been. They were merely bright lights in darkness.

"Where are you, Blair?"

He kept the advantage of darkness, gripping his own torch. "Here, with Henrietta Frensham. Who are you?" he answered.

THERE was a gruff laugh. The lights came forward. One a screened lantern turned and moved toward the far wall until it framed the Chinese girl like a cameo. She was still picking her front teeth. Blair flashed on his own torch then and light met light in glare through which it was impossible to see. He had an arm around Henrietta, with his back to the wall. She saw better than he did, because of the angle of light.

"You?" she exclaimed.

Then Blair saw. "You sir?"

"Yes!" said the commissioner. "Where did you suppose I was?" He had a secret service man beside him—numbered anonymity, who moved like a shadow. "Where is Wu Tu?" He was standing on the spot where Wu Tu had vanished.

"Damned if I know," Blair answered and the echoes multiplied his words into a roar like mocking laughter.

"Tell him!" urged Henrietta. The echoes tossed her words from wall to wall until the darkness shouted: "Tell him! Tell him—!"

The commissioner came closer—spoke in a lower voice: "Where's Frensham?"

Blair turned his torch on the heap of clothing. The commissioner stooped and examined it:

"That all? Dead? Then where's his body?"

"Damned if I know." Blair spoke to Henrietta: "He said, in Bombay, you're his god-

(Continued on page 104)

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE WANDERER'S NECKLACE

By H. Rider Haggard

Strange relic of a forgotten time, it lay awaiting its foreordained day of destiny in a hidden Viking grave. . . . For then a long dead hand would reach for it, and grasp again the love and glory of the centuries—and its final, inescapable doom.

This great story by the master of mystic drama will feature the April issue, in response to the repeated requests of our many readers for more of this author's rare and hard-to-find classic works. And other short classics of distinction.

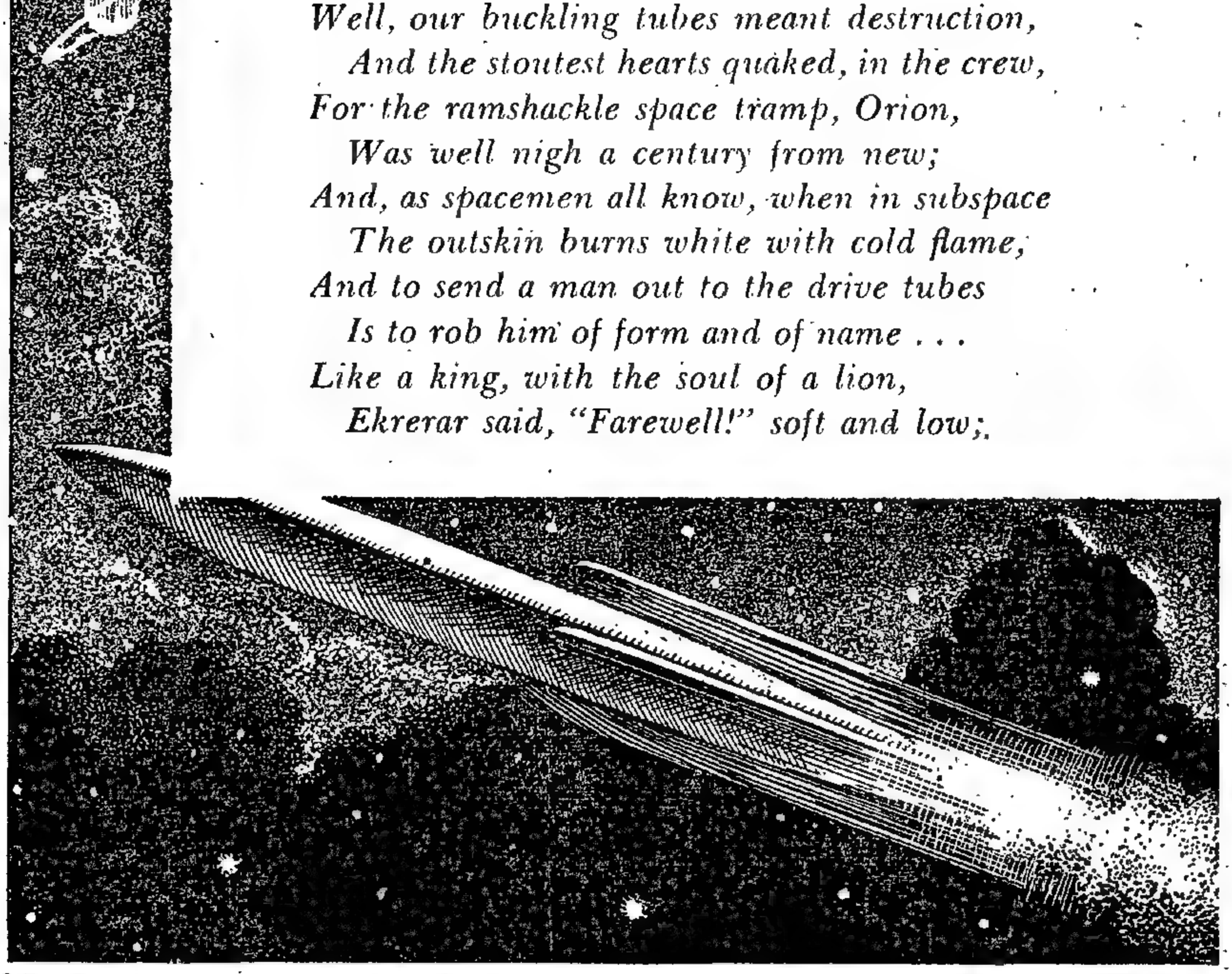
Don't miss it on your newsstand, January 21!

FAMOUS 25c

Fantastic MYSTERIES

EKRERAR OF PALORAE

WE were ninety-four days out to Centauri,
From the sand, and the sea, and the sod,
And it seemed that the ship was approaching
The darkest far outpost of God . . .
The captain was born in Palorae,
Some cluster-drowned system afar
That washed around twin, blue head giants
Instead of some sweet rolling star;
What a captain, that man! Ekrerar was
His name, with a heart cast in steel,
And a loyalty, his, for his Empire,
That few men, if any men, feel . . .
Well, our buckling tubes meant destruction,
And the stoutest hearts quaked, in the crew,
For the ramshackle space tramp, Orion,
Was well nigh a century from new;
And, as spacemen all know, when in subspace
The outskin burns white with cold flame,
And to send a man out to the drive tubes
Is to rob him of form and of name . . .
Like a king, with the soul of a lion,
Ekrerar said, "Farewell!" soft and low;



By Louis M. Hobbs

And out to the tubes, all a-blazing,
A hero, did Ekrerar go!
We dragged in his black, sundered substance,
And dressed it in splendid array—
The cloak and the sash of a captain,
And shouted, "Fire on! Jets away!"
Then off, and to distant Palorae,
Where his own world floats, far and high,
We took him, a brave but a dead one,
And buried him deep in the sky.

* * *

TWO THOUSAND YEARS LATER

'Neath the wheeling, twin suns of Palorae,
All decked in a cloak and a sash,
Floats a warrior, enshrouded in glory,
Where the star oceans ripple and flash—
What has such a warrior begotten
Where the universe thunders, sublime?
Alas! He is dead, and forgotten,
A scratch in the Stairway of Time!

The Eyes of DROMU

By Cedric R. Mentiplay

When Andrew hid the little wounded man from the crashed flying saucer, was he doing an act of kindness—or letting in a menace such as Earth had never faced before?

THE thing thrust itself upon Andrew Dexter. It came in over him like a diving Stuka from the old war, yet faster—faster. As he threw himself to the ground in instinctive reaction, he was conscious of a high, thin sound needling at the base of his brain. Dry heat was in the blasts which struck down at him. A quick glance showed him a blue-green translucence banking crazily.

Dazed and staggering, he climbed to his feet. Here and there, in an irregular pattern which nevertheless pointed the way, were patches of scorched and blackened grass. The first ones were perhaps twenty feet across, but they grew smaller as he plodded onward. They could have been made by a giant blowtorch, a jet blasting straight down from above. . . .

The thing he had seen lay near the edge of a stubbled field beyond the remains of a post-and-rail fence. It was much as reports had described its fellows—a saucer tossed haphazardly from some Olympian tea-party. Leading to it, the burned discs narrowed to the span of a hand, then gave way to a quarter-mile gash plowed in the red soil.

Andrew paused, drawing on past experience to still the beginnings of superstitious dread. He was a trained pilot who had flown jets. He was also a scientist—geology, with more than a smattering of physics. Now his observations were taking him past the first vague panic.

It was a flying wing of some sort, about twenty feet in diameter, and about six feet thick at a point somewhat forward of its center. Its skin was of a delicate greenish hue. At what would be the tail in a conventional aircraft a semicircular section was cut away, and in the opening were the unmistakable orifices of jet pipes. Andrew told himself that here was a machine that could fly, providing it had an efficient power plant. He grasped the thin edge of the machine and heaved. The whole massive-seeming fabric lifted, feather-light at his touch, so that the machine stood horizontally in perfect balance.

The geologist in Andrew Dexter took over. The skin was metallic to the touch, but it was unlike any metal he had seen. Its slim curve bore no marks of the violent landing. This was it, he told himself—the evidence, the missing link between fact and fantasy. That fabulous metal, the very size of the machine in relation to the load it must carry. . . .

Shoring the machine up with rails from the wrecked fence, he explored the underside. A circular plate moved under his hands. As he turned it, the plate swung upward. He held his breath as he worked his wide shoulders through the narrow opening.

Sunlight bathed the interior in a deep-sea glow. Stooping in a space five feet high, he saw before him a column like the old Deper-

Weaving from side to side, he managed to keep going. . . .

dussin control, surmounted by a wheel. On the wheel were a series of studs which he guessed might fire the jet or rocket tubes. A boxed telescope affair like an Aldis sight was built against the forward hull, and beside it was a flat, opaque disc something like a television screen.

Then he glimpsed the body. It could have been a bronze figurine, or the mere mummy of some space-wanderer which had drifted for a thousand years out there in the super-chill between the planets. The flesh was hard and dry, with a metallic coldness. He lifted the body—it weighed about twenty five pounds, he guessed—and dropped with it through the hatch into the sanity of sunlight.

Cradled in his arms, the tiny figure had an oddly pathetic appearance. It was humanoid, with head, hands and feet of disproportionate size as compared with the puny body. The face had the wizened look of that of a precocious dwarf. The body was dressed in a single closely knit garment, with a kind of heavy necklace. A sort of built-in pack hunched the tiny back. There were trailing wires.

What Andrew did then was akin to the action of a trained mechanic who does not quite know the function of the machine he mends. A wire dangling from the pack seemed to fit a bare place in the necklace, a hose plugged back into position, connecting the two. Then the necklace could be moved upward and clamped about the nose and sensitive, wide-lipped mouth.

The completed job gave Andrew a strange feeling of accomplishment. He could feel a faint vibration in the thin body. Something torn away in the crash was functioning again. He hoped it was some kind of artificial lung, and that it had not been disconnected too long. He picked up the body and made his best time back to his homestead at Deneven Downs.

Old Dan Russell, the handyman, did not seem greatly concerned at the visitor. A relic of the horse age, he had never quite admitted motor cars. Dan made no protests against things he could not understand. Andrew, whom he remembered as a very loud and wet baby, had sat on a synthetic gust of wind and traveled faster than sound. Did that make any more sense than a little green fellow flying around in a saucer?

"Looks kinda cold," he murmured. "Slug o' rum should fix that. Maybe I should pop 'im in the oven, eh?"

"Let him lie for a while," Andrew told him. "Get the truck out. There's a plane down in the south corner of Forty Acre. We'll lug it in."

They stowed the machine in the adjoining barn. Then Andrew went carefully over its pilot without finding anything which looked like a wound. There was no discernible heartbeat; but then, Andrew reflected, there was no guarantee the fellow had a heart. In desperation, he brought in his metallurgist's kit. He got at once a strong metallic reaction, with overtones which puzzled him.

As a last resort he cut in his Geiger counter and passed the finder over the little man's chest. A strong, even ticking could be heard in the phones. Radioactivity. Well, why not? He tucked the covers about the scrawny neck, grinning.

Then the visitors began to drop in. Neighbors had seen something, they did not know what. A reporter and photographer, saucer-hunting in a jeep, stopped for directions and went on, west instead of north. Andrew and Dan brushed them all off with a brief:

"Sorry. No saucers here. We don't touch the stuff."

EARLY the following day a car drew up outside. A large, thick-set man in a dusty blue suit and narrow-brimmed city hat walked up to where Andrew was checking his latest Geiger counts on the bench outside the barn.

"Your name Dexter?" he demanded.

"That's right," Andrew said shortly.

"They tell me you know a lot more than you say about this flying saucer, or whatever it is."

"Do they, now?" Andrew replied. "And who may they be?"

The man shrugged. "A dozen people have tabulated reports. On your property we found evidence of a crash of some kind. Neighbor saw your track yesterday with some queer junk on it. Better open up that barn, laddie."

Andrew shook his head. He moved automatically, planting his back against the locked door, watching the other two men jump from the car in response to a signal. They were mean-faced men, and, though their hands were hidden in coat pockets, each moved as if he were advancing in hostile terrain.

"Who—who are you?" Andrew asked.

"Security, bub. McKinnon's the name. Want to check? Here are my credentials."

He reached into his breast pocket, stepping closer as he did so. There may have been no significance in this, or in the fact that he passed the papers from his right to his left hand before extending them—but for Andrew, already bending forward, the danger-bells were ringing. Why would a man want his right hand free just then?

Andrew pivoted, left shoulder low. The blow grazed his face. He kept going down, turning slightly so that the knee which drove at his groin crashed solidly into corded muscle.

Then he had the man—both hands locked under the raised leg, his own lean strength uncoiling with the full power of his back and shoulders.

McKinnon uttered a short, barking cry as he described a semicircle in the air. The thick dust squirted in all directions when his back hit the ground. He lay there, momentarily paralyzed—and the two others closed in silently.

Andrew watched them, his body tense against expected metal. These were no Security men. Gangsters? Subversives? It didn't matter. In ten seconds nothing would matter any more. He set his back to the door. Before him was a vision of a thin elfin face, with translucent green eyelids which would never open now. It was as well for a man to know what he died for.

"Hold it! Another step an' ye'll 'ave one head atween yer!"

Dan Russell had the situation in hand. His whiskers quivered wrathfully as he surveyed the intruders over the scarred barrels of his shotgun. He was ready to shoot, and his intention made itself known over fifty feet of morning air.

"We got nothin' ter sell or give away," Dan went on. "Git now—while yer can walk! Git!"

They went, walking with a controlled steadiness, their eyes like dark holes in paper. The car slewed across the dirt road and went pounding back toward Collinston.

"Thanks, Dan. That might have been bad, if you hadn't—" Andrew let the words drift.

The veteran spat. "They're not beat. They're orf fer reinforcements. Don't kid yerself, boy. Yer better do now what yer shoulda done last night—get the law in."

Andrew went into the homestead kitchen, stooped over the couch where the little man lay. The Geiger-count was up again, and there was a warm, living greenness about the indefinable skin which stretched so tightly over that unknown bone structure. But it was not scientific curiosity which prompted Andrew Dexter's words.

"Sorry, Rumpelstiltskin," he said softly. "I thought I could keep this to ourselves—give you a chance to recover, and maybe get off again. You don't look like a desperate character to me—only a sort of shipwrecked mariner, entitled to what help we can give you. But you picked the wrong world to crash on, fella, and the wrong people know about it."

As he straightened up again, Andrew could have sworn that the jade eyelids flickered, momentarily exposing jet-black eyes fixed upon him with feverish intensity. He went hastily through to the telephone.

His conversation with the Federal people was long and at times baffling. In the course of two hours he met suspicion, incredulity and blank amazement: Finally he managed to punch in his story and his single request, which was for protection. He hung up with two impressions: McKinnon and his friends were not from Security, but the information which had brought them to Deneven Downs may well have been.

THAT afternoon another car came whirling up the road from Collinston. Through his binoculars, Andrew verified that it was the local police car, and Dan regretfully laid aside his shotgun. In the car were Sergeant Munro, an Army major, and two civilians with leather briefcases.

When he met them at the gate, he quickly learned who was in charge. The senior bluesuit was Captain Clelland, a thin, hawk-faced fellow with piercing eyes and an air of command. The other civilian, introduced as Mr. J. B. Frost, and the major, seemed to take their cue from him.

"I might say we checked up on you, Dexter," was Clelland's opening gambit. "Your record wasn't the kind we expected. I mean—your war record was distinguished, and you are well vouched for in scientific circles."

"Not a crackpot, eh?" Andrew suggested.

"Well, we get a lot of these stories, you know. They don't make sense—"

"Somebody made sense of them, in quick time," Andrew told him. "You have a leak there you might get around to plugging some day. I hope you can guarantee us protection."

"Protection?" Clelland looked blank for a moment. "Er let's look at the evidence, shall we?"

Andrew led them first to the barn, where the machine, impossibly small and fragile, sat poised between two sawhorses. The major touched it, stepped back hastily when the whole fabric stirred.

"You don't mean to say that anything as flimsy as this could actually carry people?" he said incredulously.

Andrew shrugged: "I made it myself, for the publicity. Got tired of my own company here."

He led them inside. They stood for a while before the still form of the saucer pilot, and all that could be heard was the soft "Fer Gawd's sake!" of Sergeant Munro.

The major shook his head. "I don't believe it!" he said.

"Just a bad dream of mine," Andrew told him. "But this is a sickroom, gentlemen. You have your verification, and you can phone it from here. The sooner we have that protective cordon laid on, the happier I'll be."

Captain Clelland appeared vaguely uncomfortable. "Sorry, Dexter," he said. "The major may be right. My orders are to remove man and machine for examination."

Andrew gasped. "Remove them? Where to?"

"The pilot will go to our headquarters for observation and screening, the plane to Air Force Headquarters. It's certainly not one of ours, and if it is really genuine there is a possibility it came from the Other Side, you know."

"If you mean from the Outside, how right you are!"

"I don't mean that!" Clelland snorted. "Surely the cold war, and Korea, haven't escaped your notice! Why, this might be the very thing –"

"Nonsense!" stormed Andrew. "The fellow is in no condition to be moved. It's a miracle he's lived so long. I won't have him separated from his machine!"

"And why not?" The captain's voice was cold.

"Something's holding him in a coma. See here, in his suit. There's a socket, and no wires to fit. Maybe he needs some sort of energy to move on this earth—something supplied from the plane. See?"

"Our instructions are to take him," Clelland said. "Lend a hand, Sergeant. He shouldn't be very heavy."

Andrew put out a restraining arm. "First, I'd like to see your warrant. You've got one, of course."

"Warrant? Certainly not! I have my orders, from the chief himself. Is that official enough?"

But now Sergeant Munro stepped forward, transferring his eyes from the green manikin to the captain, in some perplexity. "They'll do, sir. Just show me the paper."

"But, damn it, man they were verbal orders!"

There was relief in the sergeant's shrug. "This is private property. We're breakin' the law if we remove anythin' without Andy Dexter's permission, which we haven't got."

"I'll fix this!" grated the captain.

He disappeared into the hallway. They heard the clatter of the telephone, and his clipped accents gradually rising. Silence, and then more clattering. Captain Clelland reappeared, his eyes blazing.

"The line is out!" he snapped. "More of your work?"

"You know it couldn't be," Andrew said. "More likely our friends of this morning."

"And you still refuse?"

Andrew nodded. "What I said still applies."

Captain Clelland beckoned to the other government men and walked with them into the yard. Within two minutes the car, with the major and Sergeant Munro aboard, was racing back toward Collinston. Clelland and Frost came back into the kitchen, half-smiling.

"We'll have a warrant by morning," he said. "Until then, Frost and I will keep you company—unless you object."

"Not at all," Andrew told him. "I asked for protection, and I've got it. About time for supper, eh?"

But he knew that this was no solution at all. The gangsters, or whatever they were, were outside, and the government men were in, but whatever way the argument went, the little man and his machine would be lost forever by morning.

And why should he worry? Andrew could find no clear reply. Maybe he was sorry for this waif of space. Maybe he wanted for himself the honor of restoring the little man to life. Maybe he wished to test fly the machine, as he had test-flown jets. He shook his head. It wasn't any one of these, and it was greater than the sum of all of them. There was a concept of freedom here, the freedom not merely of man but of the whole vast swirling universe. . . .

He grasped at the idea unavailingly as the hours ticked by. It was big and blinding and golden—something the Greeks had for a while, perhaps, and lost—something that must be found again. Often he peered across at the thin green face, or awoke, startled, to find Clelland or Frost watching him.

Then, in the moon-brightness before dawn, it came. Dan's shotgun boomed twice from the doorway. He could hear the old man roaring curses, and a single answering cry. He snatched his service rifle from the wall and dashed out, tangling with Clelland and Frost on the way.

The barn door was half open, and near it a man dragged himself toward the darkness. Feet pounded out on the road. Behind him Clelland was shouting, "Come on! Cover the barn! They're after the plane!"

At the corner of the barn he drew a quick bead, then recognized Dan. A bullet slapped the wall above his head. He went down next to Frost, the impeccable government secretary type, who had undergone a bewildering transformation. Now the colorless little man was radiating action, his lips drawn back in a fighting grin as he pumped Browning slugs into the gloom.

Clelland was in the barn doorway. "Beginning to believe you, Dexter," he said cheerfully. "You did need a cordon—about company strength." Dust spurted in his face, and he spat. "Oh, well—they haven't got it yet!"

It came to Andrew that they were all

grouped about the barn, leaving the manikin unguarded. He started back across the yard. At once, bright flashes broke from four separate points in the darkness. One bullet tugged at his sleeve; and another passed close above him with a crack that sent him sprawling back into cover.

"Don't be a fool, man!" Frost snapped. "They're after the plane. They don't know about the pilot."

ANDREW lay there thinking, putting himself in the place of the attackers. Supposing he was determined to get into that barn, balked only by a few men shielded by darkness. He would need a diversion, and light . . . .

Then he saw it. First it was a rosy glow behind the homestead, then a bursting of yellow tongues of flame eating at the dry weatherboards. McKinnon and his men also had initiative. There would be plenty of light soon.

"The pilot! He'll be burned to a crisp!"

Andrew had scarcely gained his feet before a tackle dropped him hard on the ground again. Clelland was holding him, pinning him down, shouting to him not to be a fool. The firing started again. He could not hear the shots over the roar of the flames, but the bullets came in like driving rain. Clelland, suddenly white-faced, clasped a red-seeping thigh. Frost collapsed slowly on his face.

The homestead was an inferno. As Andrew watched, the roof crashed in and the pale heat-waves danced thirty feet high. He could see clearly now through the gutted walls into what had been the kitchen—

A tiny figure was pushing knee-deep through the embers, shouldering aside the falling beams. It walked unsteadily, as if recovering from a long sickness, but there was purpose in its steady driving progress. Now it had breached the remnants of the wall and was outside. The ruddiness of fire was in the green of its metal.

"Over here!" Andrew shouted. "Over here!"

The strange elfin shape moved out into the yard, shuffling as if the tiny legs carried an immense burden. Midway across the yard, outside the heat of the fire, it stopped. The rifles were firing again. Andrew saw sparks leap from the green shoulder. The little man had been hit. . . .

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Andrew was up and running, caring nothing for the lead whining about him. He swept the tiny figure into his arms, then gasped with dismay at the heat of it. The inflexible skin burned his fingers and singed the fabric of his coat. Weaving from side to side, he managed to keep going until he again passed through the door of the barn.

He set his burden down.

The black eyes were open, and the grin was impish, though there was pain in it. "Thank you," said the saucer pilot in a voice that was the rustle of dry leaves. "The heat—passes. Since the landing I have been helpless, my brain efficient, my body paralyzed with cold. On Dromu, we have two thousand of your degrees—"

"Quick. What can I do?" asked Andrew.

The voice strengthened. "Inside the machine, left of the column, a plug and cord. My heat-suit—"

Andrew caught the manikin up. Everything was oddly still. The fire was burning low, but there were bright streaks in the eastern sky. Across the yard men came walking, with weapons in their hands. Near him something stirred, and he recognized Clelland's drawn face.

"Get him away if you can!" grated the Security man. "They're from the Other Side. They mustn't get him!"

"But—how are you? What will happen?"

"I'll get away, and drag poor old Frost clear. You're all right, Dexter. I'll vouch for you. Now—go!"

Andrew boosted the little green man through the hatchway into the machine. A short trip into the gloom brought him what he sought—his old parachute pack and harness, hanging on their accustomed peg. He threw them before him into the plane. Then, scrabbling on the floor beside the column, he found the heat-plug and connected it to the little man's suit. Then he turned his attention to the controls.

Hunched uncomfortably on the tiny seat, he buckled on his parachute harness—a purely reflex action from his test-pilot days. Through the sighting-ports he could see the men come on, McKinnon with a burp-gun, the others with rifles and automatics. Their shots made the machine stir slightly on its tandem wheels.

He studied the buttons under his fingers on the wheel. The connections were plain enough. There were vertical and stern tubes. He sucked in his breath and pressed.

The acceleration crushed him downward, driving his chin almost against his knees. His arms and legs were impossibly heavy, and the sight drained from his eyes. When he could see again the barn was gone from around him. He moved the column slightly, and sunlight blazed across his wings. He saw the earth still dark below, but up here was a heady brightness.

"Whew!" he gasped. "Ten G's in reverse! Wonder how she'd go in level flight?"

"I'll take over now, friend."

The voice, deep and resonant, came from near his hunched knees. The little man was a glowing emerald jewel, radiating heat. His long fingers brushed Andrew's from the wheel. A gentle pressure, and he had appropriated the seat.

"I was afraid for you," the pilot said. "A life for a life, as you say. These machines are made for us, not you. That big soft body—it would tear to pieces before the rockets developed half thrust, char to ashes with the friction-heat."

Andrew blinked at him. Such a competent little fellow, yet so helpless only a few minutes ago.

"You can stand those things?"

"I am from Dromu," the little-man said simply. "You call it Jupiter. Vast bulk, thick, turbulent atmosphere, heat which keeps many things in a gaseous or molten state. We can stand—much. My name, by the way, is Janni."

"And you are an explorer?"

This seemed to amuse Janni very much. He sat awhile, fingering the controls and gazing through the forward sighting-port in an attempt to conceal his grin, before he replied. But when he spoke, his voice was sober and serious.

"We of Dromu are no strangers to this place. We were here when your people wore skins and fought the sabretooth. We have been spectators at most of your false starts, and we shall be sad when you fail again. Many times we have hoped to welcome you as brothers."

"But in all that time you haven't been seen?"

"Think, Andrew," the little man said softly. "What nation of your strange mixture has not its legends of tiny people, of gnomes, pixies, djinns, leprechauns, afreets, and a hundred other names? Why, I have heard that your folks once worshipped the blast-circles of our ships as fairy rings!"

A sudden thought struck Andrew, and he put it clumsily into words, "And you have never thought of invasion? You aren't planning to move in on Earth?"

Janni shrugged his narrow shoulders. "What have you that is worth taking? Your most precious metal is soft, useful only for mending your teeth. Your best metal decays into formless oxide. Neither would stand the fires of

Dromu. And what troublesome neighbors you would make—so arrogant, so narrow, so pugnacious! You can conceive of no other form of life than that which resides in a lump of impure carbon. Your scientists have proved we cannot exist—a pity to contradict them!"

Andrew laughed. "Not interested—and yet you speak English very well, I wonder, Janni!"

The mobile lips compressed into a thin line. "And there is the old Earthan suspicion, my friend. We of Dromu are of the solar system, and we have found out what we could about other forms of life in that system. Our dossier on the human race is quite detailed. The learning of an Earth-tongue is compulsory in our schools, as also is that of Martian—a barbarous language. Our Earth-tongue may, of course, be Russian, or Chinese. I was fortunate in the midst of my misfortune, Andrew, for it might have been much more difficult for me."

This was too much for Andrew. "If all this is true, why didn't your invisible friends rescue you?" he asked.

Janni touched the rocket-buttons gently. "You are a good man, Andrew, so you live. Do you think my people would have allowed your friends or your enemies to examine this ship?"

"Your people? Where are they?" Andrew was openly scornful.

Janni reached for the lens-sight, adjusted it carefully, and gestured to Andrew to look into the finder. He did so, and gasped. The air before them was alive with flashing discs, dipping and swerving in a broad path which stretched like a long green-silver bar across the curve of Earth and outward into space.

"Why can't we see this?" Andrew asked.

"Normally, with the speed of full flight, they are outside the limited range of your vision—below the red, or above the violet. They deflect no light-rays you can see, and so register no color. It is only the slow-flying ones you notice—or the casualties, as I was."

"But why are there so many? What are they doing?"

"We are a nation of traders," Janni said. "Other planets—Mars is one—do business with us. You note that we bypass the Earth."

ANDREW watched the patterns of strange craft forming and reforming as the machine swung in a great arc across the face of a continent at a speed many times that of sound. He was not willing to believe—yet.

"Not all of you," he remarked dryly. "There's a group of discs over that city, another over the desert to the south. What are they—sightseers?"

Janni did not answer for a long time, during which the machine completed its circle and headed back the way it had come. Andrew wondered whether the little man was having trouble compressing his thoughts into the restrictive syllables of Earth-language. Then Janni spoke, very slowly.

"As I said, we, too, are of the solar system. Just over eight of your years ago, a mushroom-shaped cloud rose out of that very desert you saw a few minutes back. It was a warning to us to prepare to save ourselves. When you divided the atom and made of it a bomb, you reached your greatest height—and plumbed your lowest depth. We sent out patrols—the Eyes of Dromu.

"The Council was prepared to act when the next atom bomb went down in anger on a target. Because of what you people have been in the past, because of what it is in your power to be, that decision has been deferred again and again. But the patience of the Council is near its end. They sent me, one of their number, to study the situation and perhaps give the signal. A mechanic's error in failing to seal the hatch let the icy atmosphere of your planet into the ship, and I lost consciousness—"

In the long pause which followed, Andrew commented lamely, "What you saw wouldn't help us. Suspicion, greed, murder—men fighting over your body and the plane."

Janni's eyes were full of a brooding wonder. "Helpless, paralyzed, and freezing in the terrestrial cold, I found pity. Pity, Andrew, for us who have never needed it. I found men who would risk their lives and honor to protect a nameless wanderer. I found loyalty—love, if you like—"

"Others would have done the same," Andrew said.

Janni brought the ship down quite low, so that the blue-green blur of Earth resolved itself into fields, and weblike scars of roads, and the lacy indentations of a coastline. Suddenly Andrew recognized the pattern of Deneven Downs, the gutted outline of the homestead, and the exploded wreckage of the barn. Cars were double-parked in the yards and on the road outside, and the place was swarming with people. As the disc hovered, he knew that they were pointing, running.

"I take your word for that, Andrew," said Janni, "for I know you honestly believe it. The Council is not ruthless. It will not destroy while there is hope. Because of what happened down there, my report will be—different. Go now, Andrew. The hatch is open, and you have your parachute. Tell them what I say. It is not too much to hope that some of them will believe. ■ ■ ■

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(Continued from page 93)

child, so he believes what you say. You tell him!"

"Tell him!" the echoes cannonaded, until they died away in a whisper down the tunnel. "Tell him—tell him—"

"Wu Tu went out of the world," said Henrietta. "You can see her sari; and here are father's clothes. They saw into another world and walked straight in." The commissioner said nothing. She continued: "The ancients, who set the Woman where she stands, went that way. Blair and I saw it. I saw what Wu Tu saw. Blair didn't."

The commissioner stroked his stubbled chin. "No," he said. "Blair wouldn't." He faced Blair. "Stick to that. You hear me? We can't have a tale like this told. India'd be a madhouse."

"How could one tell? What could one say?" asked Henrietta. "Now you know why I told nothing."

"There's been fighting, one can say that," the commissioner answered. "I passed Taron Ling's, Zaman Ali's and two other bodies. Chetusingh says all Zaman Ali's men are dead. That shuts *their* mouths. Frensham died by accident; we've found his clothes, so that's that. Who killed Wu Tu?"

Blair laughed. "You did!"

"You did—you did—!" said the echoes.

"I did? I followed and tried to overtake her Kill her? What the hell do you mean?"

"You made a noise like the end of the world," Blair answered. "It scared her into the next one. She walked straight ahead into it to escape you!"

"Can she come back? That's the problem!" The commissioner stroked his chin again. "Well, if she does, she'll wish she hadn't. She and Frensham are missing. I shall certify them dead on circumstantial evidence. You and I entered a cavern and found articles of their clothing. Stick to that. You understand me? Silence, barring a full report for File FF; you write and initial that; I'll sign it. The Bat-Brahmin won't talk. Who else might?" He turned his searchlight on the Chinese girl. At the far end of the chamber, in a pool of lantern light, she smiled serenely with her back to the wall. She was chewing something. Chetusingh was whispering to her.

Blair felt the pain in his bandaged hand. "Bite, yes." he said. "Talk, no. But she's good with a dagger. Barring luck, she'd have killed me three times over."

THE commissioner's face was invisible in the dark, but his grin could be felt, heard; it was part of his voice: "Think so? She'd

have had to answer to Chetusingh. He owns her. He'd kill her if she killed you. He swears you're the only officer he cares to work with, because he knows what you'll do. He and that girl between them substituted alcohol for Wu Tu's special drug. Did she stick you with it?"

Blair bridled. He spoke abruptly: "Why wasn't I told?"

"Told—told—told—" the echoes rumbled back and forth. The commissioner lowered his voice:

"If you'd entirely trusted Chetusingh you'd have shown it and aroused Wu Tu's suspicion. Chetusingh agreed with me, there was no way to worm this secret out of Henrietta but by using you and letting Wu Tu force the issue. We were hard on your heels."

The shadowy anonymity, with Wu Tu's sari on his arm, came and gathered up Frensham's effects by the light of the commissioner's torch. He had left his lantern in the entrance: with his arms full, he returned toward it. Chetusingh picked up both lanterns; the Chinese girl followed him, and they two led the way down the tunnel. The commissioner flashed his light in Henrietta's face, then in Blair's:

"You're dead beat, both of you. Can you climb to the cave where the cistern is? I've blankets, a spot of whiskey and some grub in a haversack. Sleep a bit, and then both of you tell me all about it. When I've seen this place by daylight, you, I, Chetusingh and two more men will get cement and seal up the wall that leads out of that burned crypt. After that we'll plug Ganesha's image tight to the wall and break the rollers somehow. Then we'll see if that gap can be reached from outside."

"It can't," said Henrietta. "I've tried. It can't even be seen."

"Well, we'll look. Come along. Lean on me if you're tired. Blair, this can't be told. We've got to keep it secret. As soon as you're rested, you and Chetusingh go straight for Dur-i-Duran Singh of Nagu Kulu. He knows too much. If he doesn't talk, he'll be trying to get in here. I depend on you to scotch him. Now let's hurry."

"Hurry! Hurry!" said the echoes.

"Come on."

"Come on! Come on!"

They pursued titanic echoes into darkness, toward a world in which three dimensions make trouble enough.

"Let's pray—" said the commissioner.

"Let's pray—let's pray!—"

"We can keep this secret!"

"Secret!—Secret!—" ■ ■ ■

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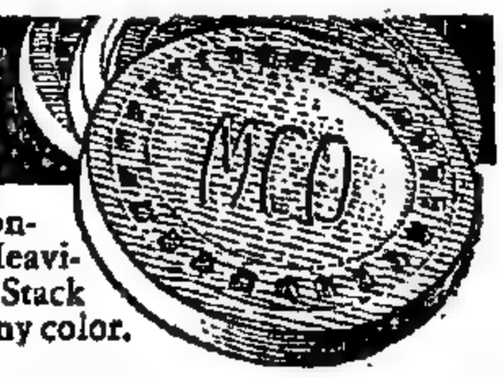

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 8)

all fan magazines ever published. This isn't really an impossible task, since I do have a tremendous background of "fanzines" numbering several thousand, beginning with the very earliest in 1930.

I would like information on several elusive stories, supposed to have been published about thirty years ago. Perhaps some of your readers could help? I say, "supposed to have been," because I've never read any specific information as to their whereabouts. Two of these particular titles are, "The Betelgeuse Express," and "Within the Earth-Atom," the latter supposed to have been a four-part serial.

Among the rarities needed for our sets are certain copies of the *Black Cat* Magazine, first year *Weird Tales*, large-size issues of the *Thrill Book* (or any other issues in fact, since they could be used for trading purposes), the January, 1930 issue of *Astounding Stories*, and the two issues of *Miracle, Science and Fantasy Stories*.

We're only interested in mint copies of the *Astounding*, and *Miracle Stories*, having in mind a reproduction of their covers.

You will be doing us a great service by featuring this in the Readers' Viewpoint.

I am fast catching up with my reading—that is, the S. F. I've missed over the past ten years, (especially the years after returning to civilian life again, getting married, etc.), and I'm happy to say that I have an almost complete file of both F.F.M. and F.N.

What prompts me to write this letter is your publishing of "Skull-Face", by Robert E. Howard. I am really delighted to see that you're really going after the very best. This will now make available a story that, until now, could only be obtained in high-priced editions and copies of WT long considered as rarities.

My main unspoken criticism of F.F.M. for the past few years has been the fact that it no longer featured any reprints from the Munsey magazines (although F.N. made up for that, for a while).

I did like the idea of reprints from book form, since this really has meant a tremendous saving to the collector who just can't afford the book editions. However, this has always seemed a bit one-sided, since I did miss the reprints from the old classic magazines. But apparently you're on the right track again. So here's looking forward to an even better future!

Larry Farsace.

187 North Union St.,
Rochester 5, New York

ROHMER FAN

The August, "The White Wolf" issue of F.F.M. was very good, and the October issue was, by my standards, excellent. The cover depicting "The Bat Flies Low" was stunning, probably because it was so different. I did expect a Virgil Finlay illustration for Sax Rohmer's story, but Lawrence did a good job. The Finlay picture of the young boy for Collier's "Thus I Refute Beelzy" more than made up for his absence in the feature story.

Now about the stories themselves. Any fantasies by John Collier, I found, are always excellent; so let's have more of him! "The Bat

Flies Low" wasn't Rohmer at his best, but it compares favorably with *any* of your F.F.M fantasies. I believe Rohmer does better in his short stories, like "Tchériapin," awhile back. (I can still see that striking Finlay illustration, picturing that "Mephistopheles-like" face!). In his shorter fantasies, like "Light of Atlantis" and "The Curse of a Thousand Kisses," he seems to abound in more engrossing plots, and better description; let's hope we may see some of these in future issues. Could we also have "Yu'an Hee See Laughs," a very good full-length fantasy-classic by Rohmer?

If there are any Rohmer fans in the audience, or any who have a book or so by him, would they please contact me, as I'm trying to start a collection of his books?

John R. Colombo.

114 Pandora Ave.,
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

P.S. I'm happy to see Robert Howard's "Skull-Face" in F.F.M.: it's really a fantasy classic. Good luck!

WANTS MORE COLLIER STORIES

Thanks for publishing my letter in the August issue. Due to it, I have now completed my set of F.N. and am in the process of completing my set of F.F.M.

I'd like to announce that I am disposing of my hard-cover books and my pocketbooks in favor of a concentration on magazines. I have about sixty stf and fantasy books, and about seventy p-b's. If anyone is interested in them, I'd appreciate it if they'd send me a stamped, self-addressed envelope for a list of what I have.

I am much more interested in trading for pre-45 magazines than in selling. At this writing I need nine copies of *Astonishing Stories* and the following five *Super Sciences:* 1940: March—1941: March, May—1942: May, August. I am looking for about 11 of the large size *Wonder Stories*, and almost all of the small-sized issues, as edited by Hugo Gernsback. I am also looking for a great many pre-1938 *Amazings*, and some scattered post-38 issues. I need several tons of *Astoundings* and about 27 *Unknowns*, particularly April 1939.

I have recently read a short novel I think would be ideal for your magazine, especially as it originally appeared in the November 1941 *Super Science Stories*. The story in question is "Lost Legion" by Lyle Monroe, who, if I'm not mistaken, is one of the many pennames employed by Robert Heinlein during that period of his writing. This story gave me one of the best evening's entertainment I have had in some time. I wish you would read it—your offices should have a file copy—if you have not already done so. It is my personal opinion that you will then agree with me that the story is well-worth reprinting.

I have not yet read the October novel, but the Collier short has long been one of my favorite stories. If I am not mistaken, this is Collier's first appearance in your magazine. I hope he returns many, many times.

Your line-up for the December issue is one of

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

the best any fantasy magazine could have. And the sources it is drawn from show how widely diverse the field of science-fantasy has become.

Robert P. Hoskins.

Lyons Falls,
New York

OPEN LETTER TO ALL READERS OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

The rapidly increasing popularity of tape and wire recorders has given rise to a new and most fascinating hobby Tape-respondence or Wire-respondence.

I'm an old-time science fiction reader myself, and it occurred to me that this hobby would be of especial interest to my fellow readers, be they active fans or not.

This type of communication is definitely on the scientific side. It is the very latest and there is nothing else like it. It is a great boon to the many of us who carry on a heavy personal correspondence. By using "Talking Letters" instead of the old fashioned kind you can triple and quadruple your present output of correspondence, and do it pleasantly, effortlessly.

Compared to most other hobbies, Tape respondence or Wirespondence is an inexpensive hobby. A good recorder costs no more than a good radio and, with ordinary care, lasts as long. Only a few tapes or wires are needed because each may be used hundreds of times and can be mailed anywhere for only a few cents.

Let this be clearly understood: I am not trying to sell you anything. I am *not* connected with the recording industry, nor do I seek personal publicity or financial gain. In short, I have no axe to grind. I'm enthusiastic about tape-respondence or wirespondence because I think it's a wonderful hobby, a hobby that I'd like to share with you.

Talking and listening to people from everywhere is a tremendous thrill. I know, because I've exchanged well over 1,200 "Talking Letters" with many people in this and 18 foreign countries. Although many of my friends live thousands of miles away I know more about them, their families, their work, their every-day affairs than I do about the people living in the next apartment. In fact, my "Talking Letters" friends mean just as much to me as do my personal friends of many years' standing.

In response to numerous requests I am now forming an organization, Tape-Respondents, International. This is an association of congenial men and women who like to make friends by exchanging "Talking Letters" with people all over the world.

Membership is open to all. There is no obligation. Anyone who has a friendly disposition and a recorder (tape or wire) may join. Here is something new, fascinating, intriguing—something fine.

Join T-R-I today! Get in touch with me by tape, by wire, or by letter. I'll be glad to have your ideas and suggestions. Fred Goetz, 3488 22nd St., San Francisco 10, California.

Sincerely yours,
Fred Goetz, Secretary.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

PAGING DIRCE ARCHER

As usual, your stories the last few times have been decidedly up to par (or higher!). Give us all the fantastic-adventure yarns you want, mixed in with the type of these last few, and a few "lost race" ones or prehistoric civilization stories, just for variety. But *don't* give us many of the weird type, werewolves, vampires, black magic, witches, etc., which properly are not Fantasy but Weirds, which are a class to themselves!

I'm certainly glad you're back to your old size, with more room for stories and with more illos, even if the edges aren't trimmed, nor the paper slick—these make no difference to me, so the stories are the kind I like—as yours have mostly been, with a few exceptions, such as those things printed in '46. "Man Who Was Thursday," and "The Terrible Three."

Paging Dirce Archer—will you please write, and send me your address? ? I wanted to answer your letter, but there was no address, so am hoping F.F.M. will print my appeal!

Mrs. C. W. Vallette.

Declo, Ida.

NOT A JACK MANN FAN

As a very infrequent contributor to your magazine, I felt compelled to comment on "Her Ways Are Death" by Jack Mann, which I just finished.

Although handling a plot with great potentialities, the author managed to so infuse it with English stuffiness, that it was virtually unreadable. This tedium of style seems to be a trait unique with the British with their stiff social conventions and so deeply engrained traditions.

The writers from across the pond have produced some very superior reading material, but let's have no more of Gees and his frigid secretary.

In spite of the high tribute paid to his mentality by the other characters, (the word is well chosen) in the novel, the excellent Mr. Green appears singularly inept. In other words, Mr. Mann appears *incapable of infusing his characters with* the personal attributes he's striving for. Indeed, his characterization is lifeless, insipid, dull and boring in the extreme.

This tirade is not directed at he quality of your publication. You ordiAarily print novels of such high calibre that no commeit is necessary. They speak for themselves.

In the unlikely possibility that this letter sees print, I have back issues of F.F.M. dating back to 1946 which I will sell for what they cost on the stands, plus 10c for postage and handling charges. Also, for the benefit of any readers interested, I have twenty-four of the old Gernsback *Amazings* for sale at $1.00 each. Thank you.

Dale E. Ridgeway.

465 Lily St.,
Mansfield, Ohio.

LIKES HORROR-FANTASY

I've only been reading F.F.M. for a short time, but have been a fantasy and horror fan for

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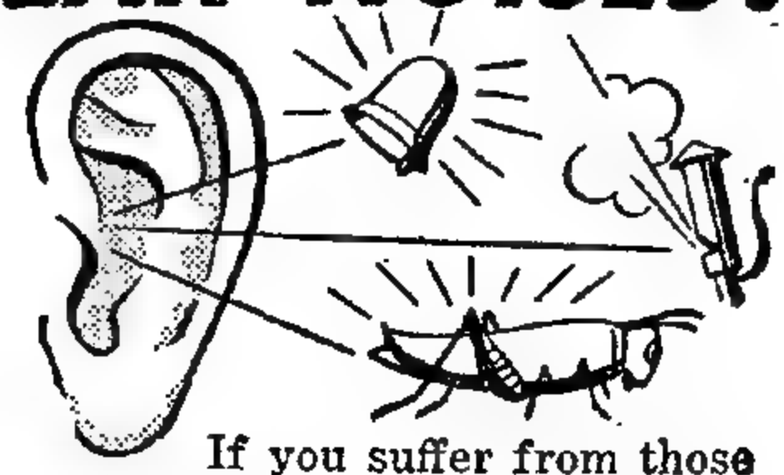

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

some time. I would like to praise you on the top quality of your mag, though I was a bit disappointed to see that you are letting some of your stories get too near to s.f. Please stick purely to fantasy.

I would like to see some of the horror type stories come more frequently in F.F.M. I am going to suggest some of the authors I would like to see more of in F.F.M. (also some stories).

First and foremost in my mind in the fantasy and horror field is Bram Stoker. In my opinion no one can outdo him. I would like to see, if possible, some reprints of his stories from your early issues and also some that you haven't published. Please, please more Stoker.

Next, H. P. Lovecraft (that is, some of his best). Also, how about some more of Robert Bloch's best, such as "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper." Others: Howard, Derleth, Blackwood (some), Le Fanu, Rohmer, E.F. Benson, John Collier and M.P. Shiel.

Stories I would like to see: "Lurker on the Threshold"—Lovecraft, "Camp of the Dog"—Blackwood, and Stoker stories (they're all good) except "Dracula," which is too long, and "Old Dark House"—Priestley.

Any readers of F.F.M. who have issues in which appear any Stoker stories, I would like if they would contact me quoting their prices.

In closing, I would like to praise you on your fine mag. Keep them coming and keep up the good work.

Burton Satz.

6404 Colgate Ave.,
Los Angeles 48, Calif.

NEEDS HAGGARD ITEM

It has been a long time since I have written to you. I enjoyed "Her Ways Are Death" by Jack Mann, very much.

I wish you would publish some of George Griffiths, and William Le Queux's books. Also stories of George Allan England, which have never appeared in book form at any time.

I now have 36 books by William Le Queux; but I know of 90 titles that I am still missing, so I have a long way to go to complete my collection of his books. He was a prolific writer. I am still looking for 62 books by Guy Thorne, to complete my collection of his books.

I seem to have reached an impasse in my Haggard collection. There is just one title that I do not have in any edition. This appeared in a paper-covered American edition. Two titles in one book, "My Fellow Laborer" and, "The Wreck of the Copeland."

I have a complete collection of *Weird Tales* starting with the January, 1925 issue, which I am willing to sell to the highest bidder. Or I will sell by years. Also the complete collection of 13 *Strange Stories* and the complete collection of the English magazine, *Tales of Wonder* in 16 issues. Also have many English Omnibus books of Fantasy.

HAROLD F. KEATING.

7 Arnold St.,
Quincy 69, Mass.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

AN ARDENT READER

Among my collection of old books and magazines I have five bound volumes of *The International Monthly Magazine*. Incidentally, these are all that were ever published. In the third volume, dated April 1, 1851, I came across a story by Mary Shelley entitled "Transformation", and if I may say so it reads better, in my opinion, than Frankenstein. In brief, it is a story of a man who loaned his body for three days to a dwarf for a sea chest full of jewels and discovered that his soul is trapped in the body of the dwarf while the other is taking over his place in society. It is really worthy of being reprinted in your fine magazine.

I am an ardent reader of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and hope to be for many years to come.

In case you print this I wish to thank the lady who sent me "She and Allen" by H. Rider Haggard. I lost her letter, and so could not write and thank her.

Wishing the F.F.M. many more years of publishing success.

WILLIAM B. WILSON.

Box 285,
Ashburnham, Mass

AUSTRALIA CALLING US

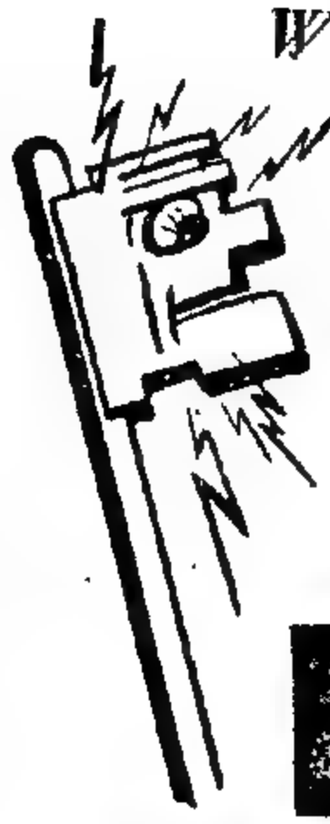
My main purpose in writing this letter is to tell you what a wonderful mag you have and how unfortunate it is that I cannot buy same in Australia. Having read only four of your F.F.M.s. namely H. R. H.'s "Morning Star," Wells' "The Time Machine," Talbot Mundy's "The Gray Mahatma" and lastly "The Valley of Eyes Unseen" by Collins (as yet unread), I would like to add my distant voice in praise of this fine magazine.

To read them is to me an education. The stories are all of the best quality. I enjoyed each of the three I have been lucky enough to get hold of. "Morning Star" was perhaps the one that stirred me most. I read it four times, anyway. Your artist, Virgil Finlay, really does some remarkable drawing. We have an artist out in Australia who does similar work but not so good, whose name is also Virgil.

Well, to get to the main item of interest to me anyway, I would like to get hold of past and present copies of F.F.M., but the only way I could do this is by the exchange system if any readers are interested. I have stacks of books like Sports mostly, such as Motor Racing, which I hope I will be able to exchange with some of your readers. Money is no object if someone would like to sell for some Australia money. I think at present one dollar is in our money twelve lar if anyone up there is interested.

I wish to inform you of the change in my mail-shillings, and I do have one lone Canadian doling address.

So I will hope to hear from someone soon. I will answer all letters if anyone cares to write to a twenty-five-year-old Australian man, as a pen friend or a prospective exchanger.



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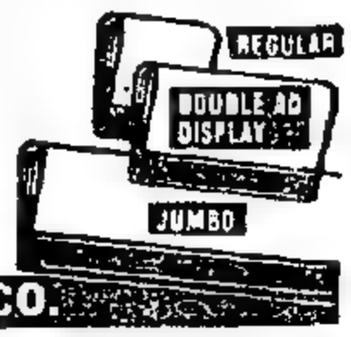

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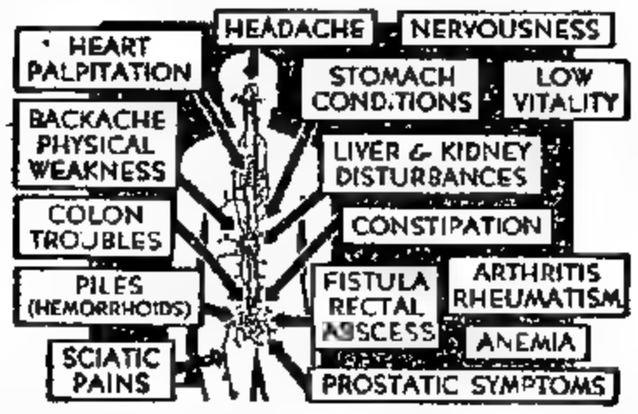

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Thank you, Mrs. Gnaedinger. I hope that one day soon you may be able to find space for this.

Once more, thank you for putting out a mag that will still enable me to fill in lots of more hours, for I will read them all more than once.

TOM A. COWLES.

61 O'Connell St.,
Newtown, Sydney,
Australia.

SHE WANTS A RARE BOOK

Nothing I could say about F.F.M. could express the enjoyment I get from the wonderful stories it contains. I understand that F.N. is not being published now. What a shame! I have just purchased fifteen back issues of F.N. and some F.F.M.'s and how I loved them. Among these issues were such wonderful stories as the "Polaris Trilogy" by Stillson and several stories by Merritt.

The letters from your readers are the first things I turn to. It amuses me to find what definite opinions they all seem to have. I guess I must be easily pleased because I like almost every story you print in your publications.

Now, may I ask your readers if there is a copy of "Ayesha, The Return of She" by Haggard somewhere around that I could purchase (if in expensive) or rent, perhaps?

About the art work, it's very nice. I particularly like Lawrence for covers and Finlay and Bok for interior illos.

I would like to hear from some married women who are also interested in fantasy and s-f.

Oh, yes! And I just remembered. I also would like to get "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" by Merritt. Can you help me? It could be in mag or book form.

Thanks again, Mrs. Gnaedinger, for selecting **such exceptional stories for your mag.**

MRS. JACQUELYN LEWIS.
East Montpelier, Vermont.

CLIPPINGS WANTED

Flying saucer clippings wanted from newspapers, especially accounts written in locality of occurrence. Inquire on AP, UP etc. Press dispatches. Also saucer material from obscure mags, and radio references. Source and date must be given if tear-sheets sent. All people interested in discussion of saucers write me. Also want books and mag material by Joseph McCabe; fanzines; stf and fantasy mags. Thousands of fantasy and non-fantasy items to trade for above. Trade example: 1 late fantasy mag for 3 clippings. Inquire if not acceptable. Above items also for sale at reasonable prices. Will buy your *Astoundings, Horrors, Terrors,* etc.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

"MORE ENJOYABLE THAN EVER"

I didn't care for "The Death Maker." I read it years ago and think the proper place for it would be in a detective magazine and not F.F.M. "The Valley of Eyes Unseen" was good, but I didn't like it as well as "The Starkenden Quest." I have read lots of Mundy's stories I liked better than "The Gray Mahatma." I happen to have one I think is a better fantastic by him called "There Was A Door."

I think I would pick "The Slayer of Souls" as the best story printed in F.F.M. in 1951. I suppose lots of the readers will disagree with me. How about another Haggard? Hope it will be one I don't have. I have nine by him not counting those already printed in F.F.M. My favorite is "Ayesha" which is also the most fantastic.

Think I will ask again for "Allan and the Holy Flower." Another story which would be very appropriate for F.F.M. would be "The Scarlet Empire" by David Parry. The copy I have was published in 1906 so it must be quite an old book. It is quite a *different* story of Atlantis. Have been rereading my F.F.M.'s these winter evenings and found most of them more enjoyable than ever.

P. H. MALONE.

3502 Union St.,
Eureka, Calif.

Editor's Note: "There Was a Door" is the English title for "Full Moon."

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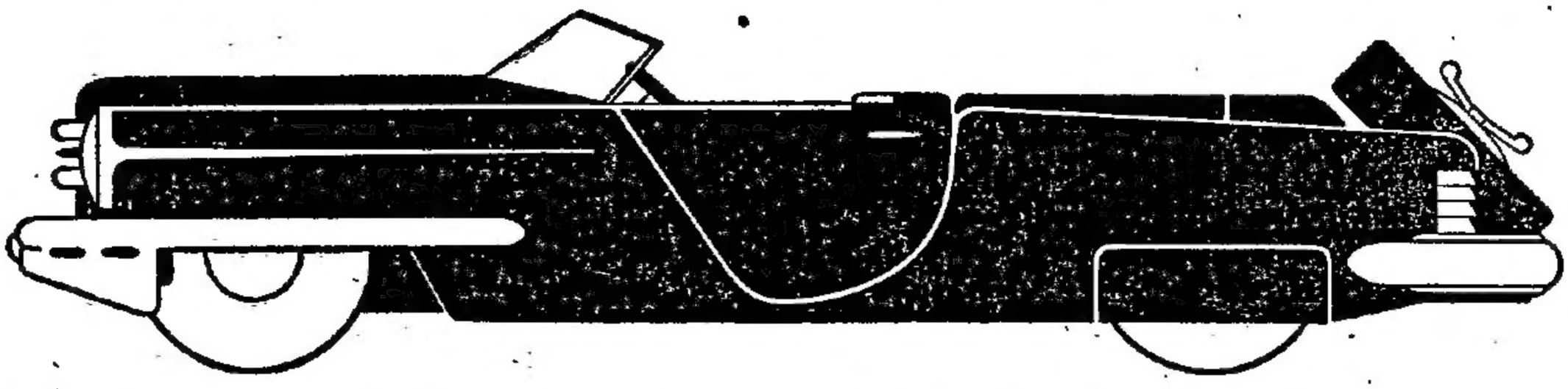

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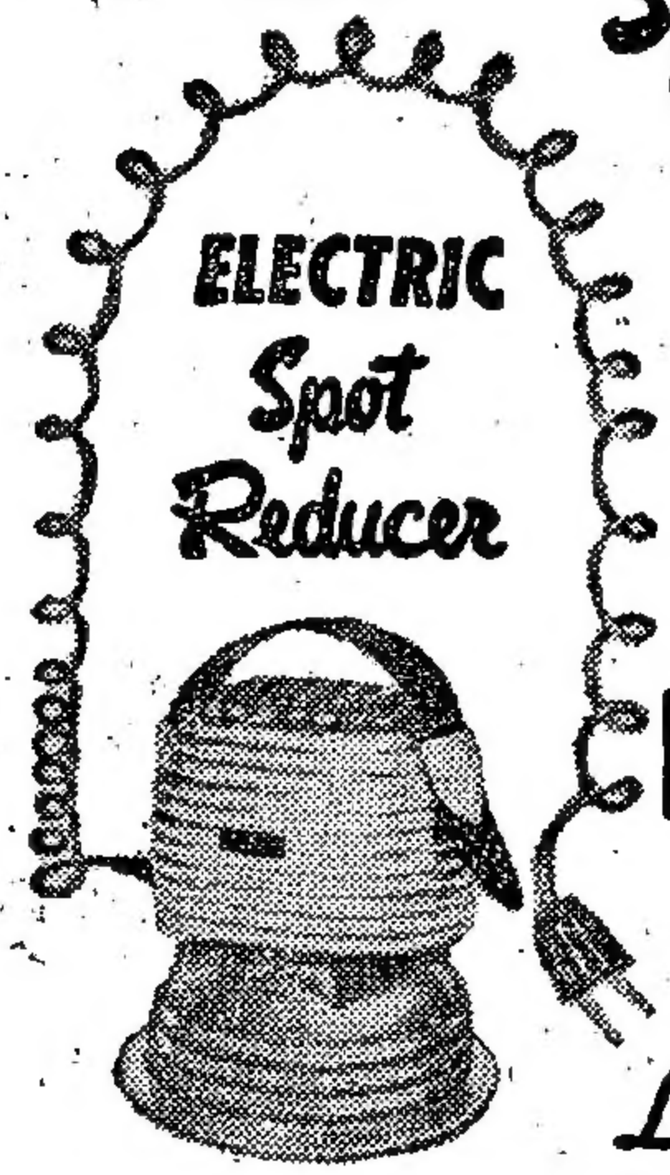

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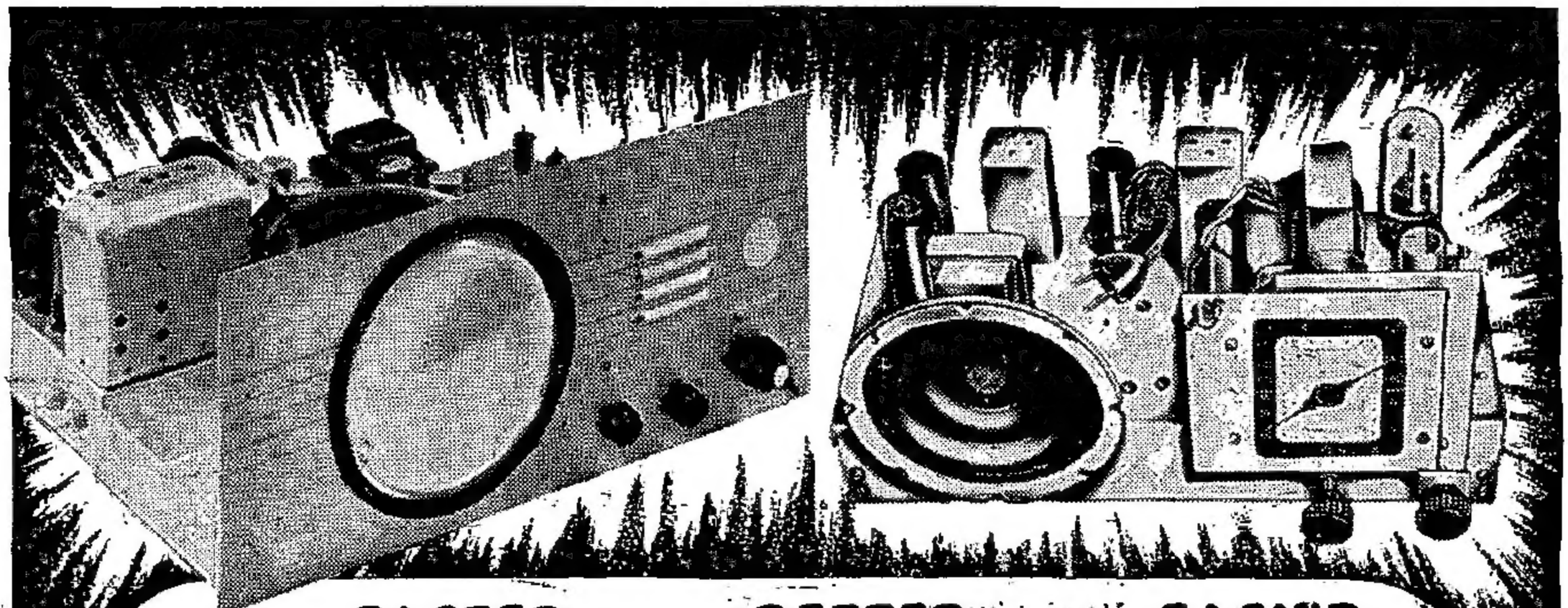

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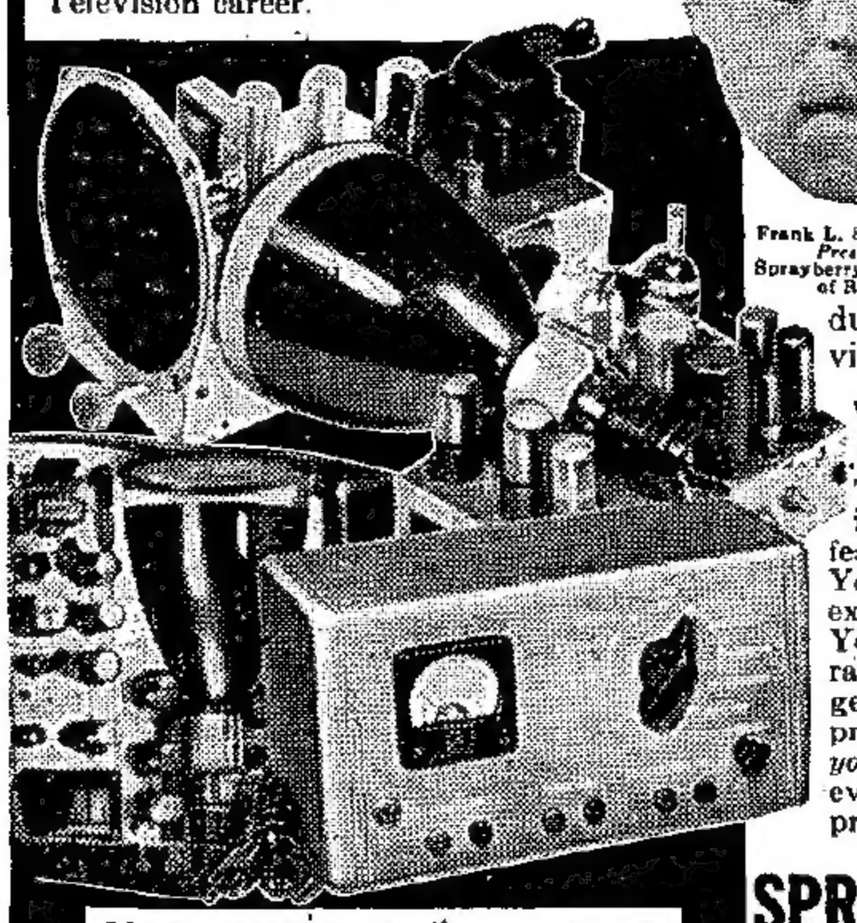

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